



THE Atlantic

MAY 2001 MONTHLY

Russia Is Finished

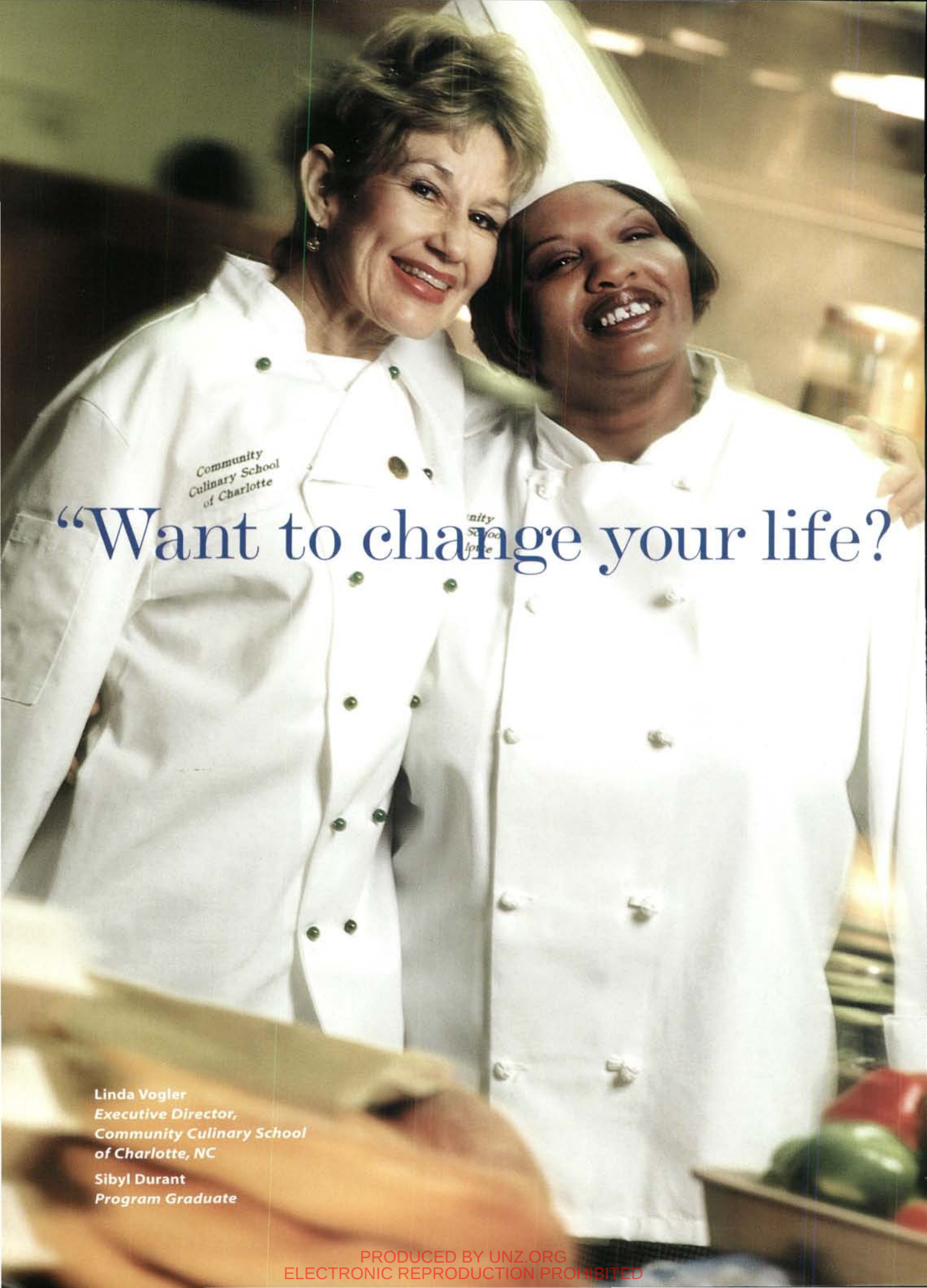
*The unstoppable descent
into social catastrophe
and strategic irrelevance*

BY JEFFREY TAYLER

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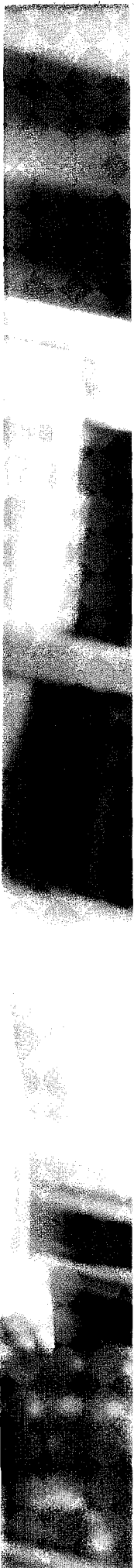
A photograph of two women in white chef uniforms and tall white hats, smiling warmly in a kitchen setting. The woman on the left is older with short, wavy brown hair, and the woman on the right is younger with dark hair. They are both looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred kitchen with warm lighting. The text "Want to change your life?" is overlaid in a large, dark blue serif font across the middle of the image. The woman on the left has a name tag that reads "Community Culinary School of Charlotte".

“Want to change your life?”

Linda Vogler
*Executive Director,
Community Culinary School
of Charlotte, NC*

Sibyl Durant
Program Graduate

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In this kitchen, chefs Linda Vogler and Sibyl Durant make a difference in the fight against hunger. When she was a struggling mother with few employable skills, Sibyl wondered how she would find a steady job. Then she discovered the Community Culinary School of Charlotte, North Carolina. There, jobless and homeless adults train for food service careers by preparing nutritious meals for the hungry. As a working chef, Sibyl now enjoys the pride of helping others and the dignity of helping herself.

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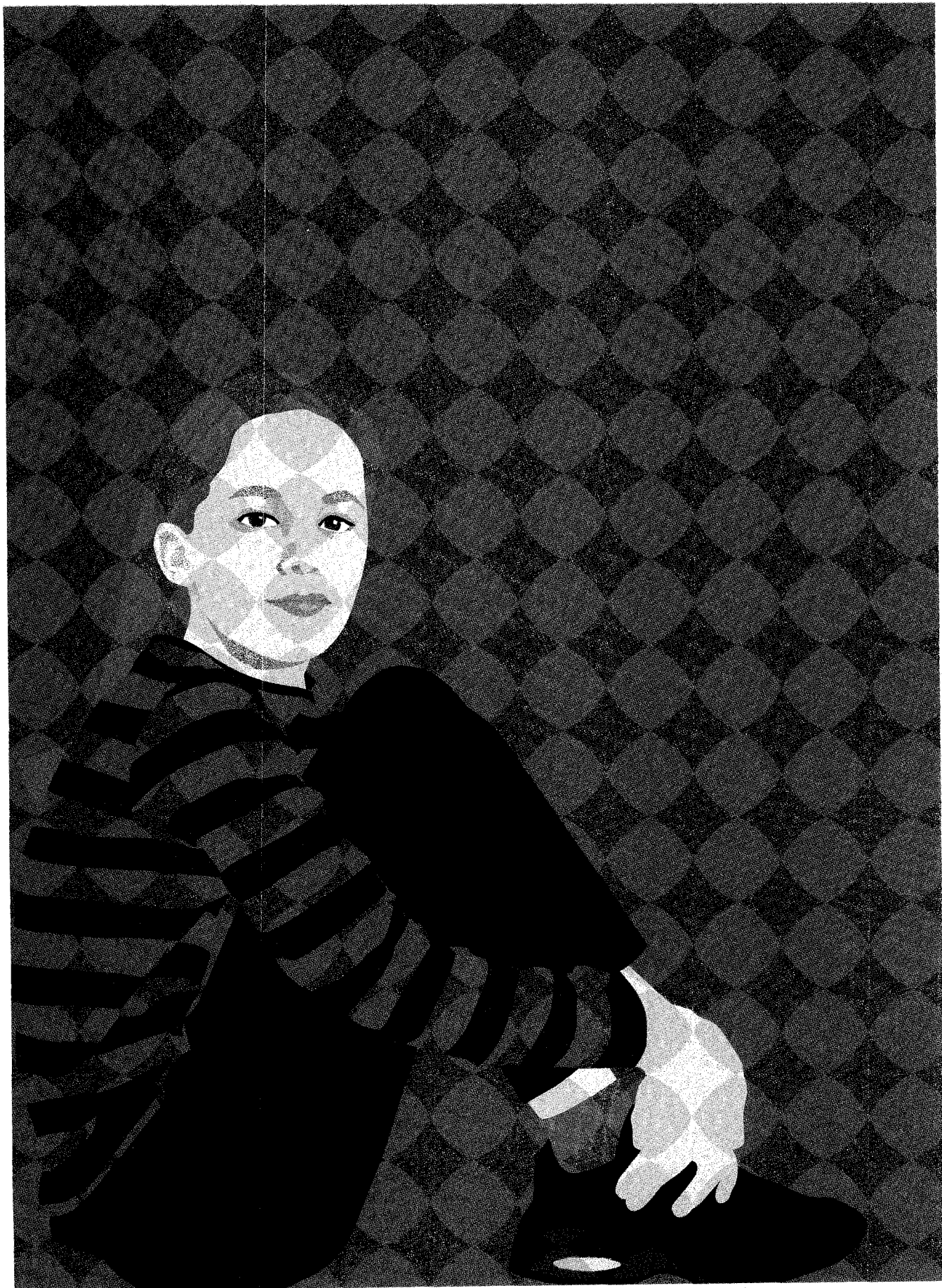
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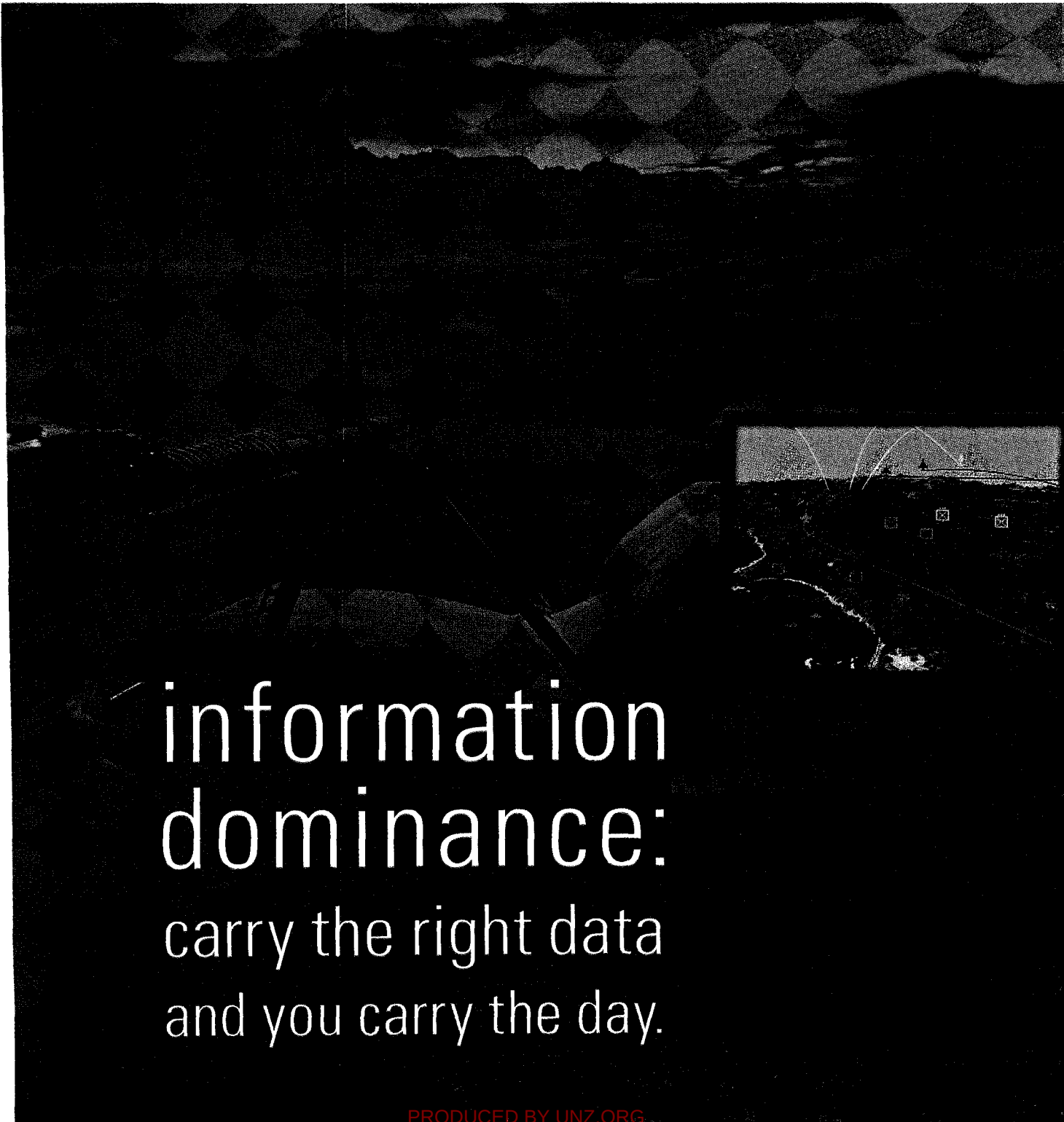
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THE Atlantic

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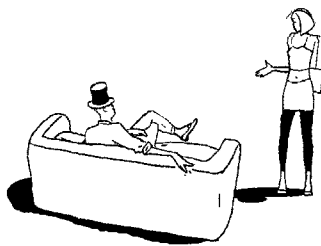
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Cover photograph by Anne Fishbein; heading drawings throughout by Istvan Banyai



77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

In September of 1998 HarperCollins brought out the American edition of a small book on an esoteric subject: the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The book, by Simon Winchester, had two things going for it. One was a terrific title—*The Professor and the Madman*, with the subtitle “A Tale of Murder, Insanity and the Making of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.” The other was the fact that it was simply wonderful, a beautifully written narrative that worked both as a history of lexicography’s greatest hit and as a drama. Still, it was not the sort of book anyone would have expected to become a commercial triumph.

It had no celebrity angle—in all of its 242 pages there was not one picture of either Oprah or Martha. It contained no stupendous news, no recent scandal, no gimmicks. It was, as Winchester says, “a book that stands on its own, telling a story about language and the joy of language, and telling this story at some length.” It existed only for the purpose of tale-telling, of being read for pleasure—a mild, sober, unsensational pleasure. As we all know, people don’t go in for that sort of thing anymore. In Britain, where *The Professor and the Madman* had been published the previous June, it had made the *Times* of London best-seller list, but only for a week, and there didn’t seem to be any reason that a book about an English dictionary would sell any better in America. Indeed, Winchester’s usual American publisher, Henry Holt, had declined to publish it. “They said that this was not a book but a magazine piece,” Winchester recalls. “Specifically, they said that this was a piece for *The Atlantic Monthly*.”

On Sunday, March 25, 2001, *The Professor and the Madman* celebrated its fifty-second week on *The New York Times* paperback best-seller list. The book had previously enjoyed twenty-seven weeks on the hardcover best-seller list. It has sold 250,000 copies in hardcover, and is currently in its twenty-seventh printing; 440,000 paperback copies have been sold, with nineteen printings. To date, sales worldwide total about 800,000.

Winchester believes that the book’s unexpected success—unexpected by Winchester as much as by anyone else—suggests something that book publishers and magazine editors should note. “It shows, I think, that there is deep, deep down—but underserved for a long time—an eagerness

for real stories, real narratives, about rich and interesting things,” he says. “We—writers, editors—just ignored this, by-passed this. Now we are tapping into it again.”

We are. In this issue *The Atlantic Monthly* offers the first in its new “Centerpiece” series. Centerpieces will appear as quarterly special sections, each one showcasing a long nonfiction narrative. The intention is to build a home in our magazine for the best and most ambitious in nonfiction narrative writing, and the emphasis here is on the word “narrative.” Like Winchester, we are betting that our readers feel an eagerness for real stories about rich and interesting things.

As it happens, the first of those stories is by Simon Winchester. It is a further chapter in the long, great narrative of language and the joy of language. More precisely, it is the story of a remarkable polymath and his remarkable invention—an invention, Winchester argues, that had a profound and ultimately lamentable effect on the way we perceive and use language.

As Winchester reports, more than 30 million copies of Peter Mark Roget’s *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* have been sold since the book was first published, in London, in May of 1852. In the world of the word the thesaurus, like the dictionary, was an epochal event; there is Before Roget and there is After Roget, and the eras are tremendously different.

In Winchester’s view, this difference is largely malign, although not purposely so. Roget did not set out with his thesaurus to visit destruction upon a vulnerable language; it was more a sort of accidental catastrophe of being—rather like the European devastation through disease of the natives of the Americas. Roget changed the way we think about words, and this change, Winchester shows, is a great deal more reaching in its effects than we realize. Reaching, he says, and wrecking: Roget made us more or less permanently lazy about language; he taught us, essentially, to elide the distinctions between words, and distinctions are, in the end, what words are all about.

This is an argument that is sure to win critics. Winchester says he is looking forward to being pummeled in the Letters column and to defending himself “in the usual feeble, pathetic way of authors.” In the meantime, whether they agree or disagree with his thesis, readers will, I hope, enjoy a real story about a rich and interesting thing. —MICHAEL KELLY



Simon Winchester



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IN THIS ISSUE

When **Jeffrey Tayler** settled in Moscow, in 1993, he was optimistic about Russia's prospects for reform and prosperity. No longer. In this month's cover story ("Russia Is Finished") Tayler explains how centuries of political repression and other deeply rooted factors have created a culture of apathy and corruption that all but ensures Russia's descent into social chaos and strategic irrelevance. Tayler is the author of *Siberian Dawn* (1999) and *Facing the Congo* (2000). Articles he wrote for *The Atlantic* are included in Houghton Mifflin's *Best American Travel Writing* (2000).

The first edition of Peter Mark Roget's thesaurus, in 1852, marked the culmination of an epic lexicographical effort that may have permanently altered the course of the English language—perhaps for the worse. **Simon Winchester** ("Word Imperfect") makes a case for consigning Roget's project to the dustbin of history. Winchester has written more than a dozen books, most notably the best-selling *The Professor and the Madman* (1998). His next book, *The Map That Changed the World*, about the birth of modern geology, will be published in August.

The "greatest gambling mind in the world" may belong to a Minnesotan with an IQ of around 70. **Jack El-Hai** ("One Smart Bookie") sketches a profile of the bookmaker Max Weisberg, whose inability to tell right from wrong has, in effect, given him immunity from prosecution. El-Hai is working on a biography of the lobotomy pioneer and practitioner Walter J. Freeman.

You've seen it before. You'll see it again. **Ian Frazier** ("Techno-Thriller") offers a sneak preview of something that's coming soon to a theater near you. Frazier's last article for *The Atlantic* described the pleasures of sulking. He is at work on a book about Siberia.

Anthony Doerr ("The Hunter's Wife") lives in Boise, Idaho. His first book of short stories, *The Shell Collector*, will be published next year.

Some 15,000 items end up in Grand Central Terminal's Lost and Found each year. What happens to them? **Richard Rubin** investigates, in the inaugural installment of an occasional photo feature called Special Collections.

This past February, Avery Dulles, the scion of a great establishment family, became the first American theologian to be made a Roman Catholic cardinal. **J. Bottum** ("One Establishment Meets Another") reports from Rome. Also in Notes & Dispatches this month: **Benjamin Ryder Howe**, from San Salvador, on what happens when a country abandons its own currency and switches to the dollar; **Bill Donahue**, from Portland, Oregon, on intimate surveillance in the nation's highest-tech senior home; **Peter Maass**, from Mogadishu, on how Africa's *Mad Max* zone became the ultimate experiment in unfettered capitalism; and **Carl M. Cannon**, from Washington, D.C., on Presidents and baseball.

The secret to hosting a successful dinner party lies not in what you serve your guests but in where you seat them. **Mary Killen** ("Putting Guests in Their Place") offers practical tips from the halls of high society. Killen, an advice columnist for *The Spectator*, in London, writes regularly for *The Daily Telegraph* and the British edition of *House & Garden*.

Though governed now by China, Hong Kong and Macau have managed to retain their cosmopolitan character—so concludes **Jamie James** ("Hong Kong and Macau Reflagged"). James's first novel, *Andrew and Joey*, will be published this winter.

On May 3 National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* will mark its thirtieth anniversary. **Bill McKibben** ("Everything You Need to Know") looks back on the show's three decades and on the formula behind its enduring appeal. McKibben is currently a fellow at the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life, at Harvard University. His most recent book is *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously* (2000).

The Accidental Tourist, *Saint Maybe*, and *Breathing Lessons* helped to establish Anne Tyler's reputation as an astute and humane chronicler of the grief that often underlies the commonplace. **Katharine Whittemore** ("Ordinary People") considers Tyler's literary reputation and the disconcerting lightness of her new novel, *Back When We Were Grownups*. Whittemore is a senior editor at *FamilyFun*. Her writing has appeared in *Smithsonian*, *Lingua Franca*, and *The American Prospect*.

The caustic, anarchic wit of Auberon Waugh was one of the defining features that gave the British magazines *The Spectator* and *Private Eye* much of their zest during the 1970s and 1980s. **Geoffrey Wheatcroft** ("Bron and His 'Affec. Papa'") looks back on Waugh's career and on the influence that his complex relationship with his father, Evelyn, exerted on his life and writing. Wheatcroft is a frequent contributor to *The Atlantic*. His article on the decline of the BBC appeared in the March issue.

Something startling happened to Philip Roth when he reached his sixties: at an age at which most authors begin to decline, Roth began writing his best books. **Jason Cowley** ("The Nihilist") reviews Roth's new novel, *The Dying Animal*. Cowley is the literary editor of *The New Statesman*. His first novel, *Unknown Pleasures*, was published last June.

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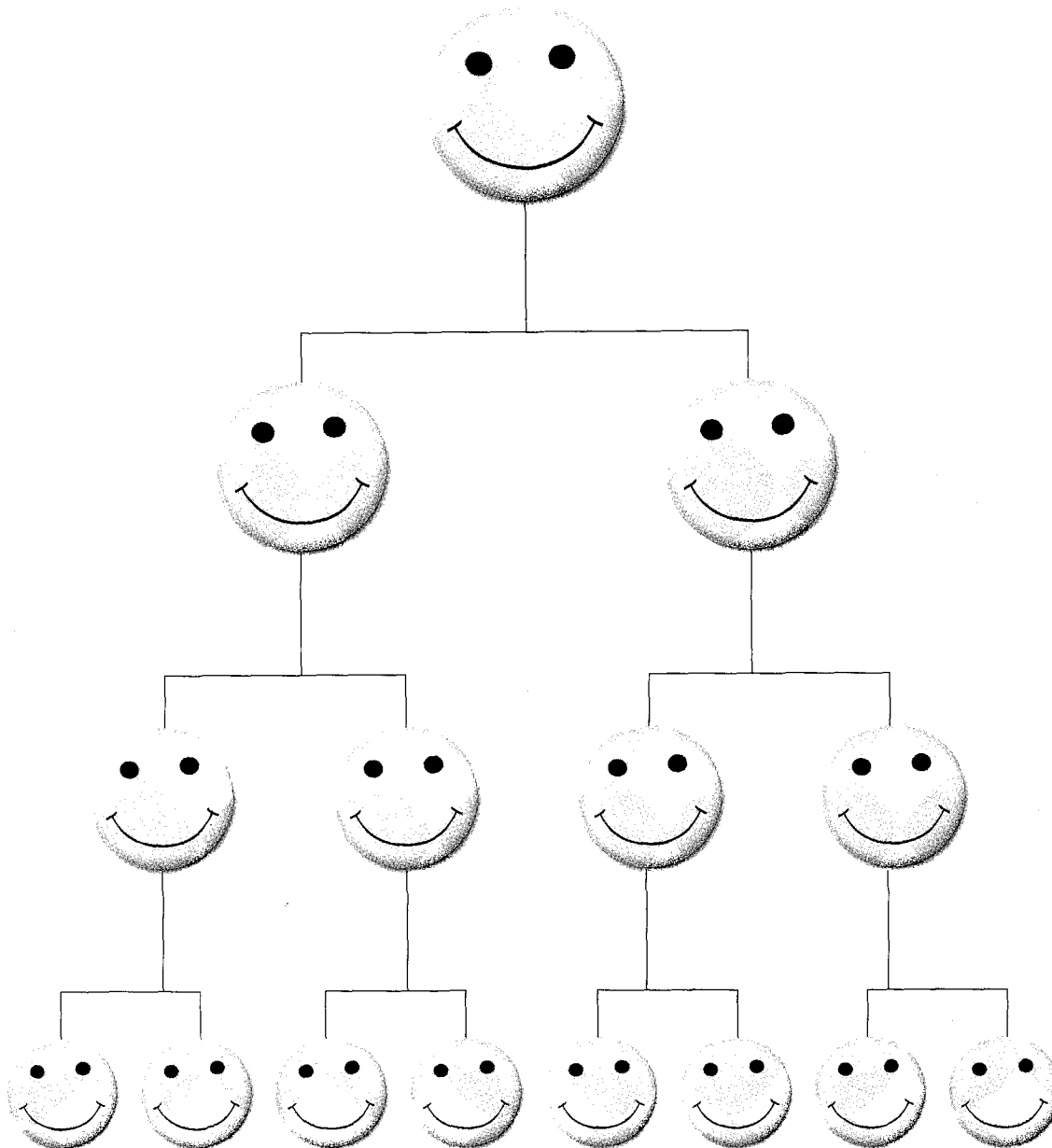
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shock and Disbelief

"Shock and Disbelief" by Daniel Smith (February *Atlantic*), incorrectly characterizes those who urge caution on electroconvulsive therapy as falling into one of three groups: "a handful of former ECT patients, some dissenting psychiatrists, and the Church of Scientology." Smith may be surprised to learn that a number of established organizations in the mental-health field also believe that a high degree of caution is warranted. For example, the official policy statement of the National Mental Health Association, America's oldest and largest nonprofit organization addressing all aspects of mental health and mental illness, includes the recommendation "that ECT be presented as an alternative with extreme caution, only after all other treatment approaches, such as medication and psychotherapy, have either failed or have been seriously and thoroughly evaluated and rejected."

Although many people have been helped by ECT, it is a mistake to discount the compelling stories of those who have suffered severe and permanent disability in its wake. Although they may represent a minority of recipients, there is no way to know in advance who will experience similar deficits, as even proponents admit. As a result, ECT should remain a treatment of last resort, and the choice to use it must be a truly informed decision, made competently and without coercion.

*Michael M. Faenza
National Mental Health Association
Alexandria, Va.*

In 1960, when I was seventeen, electroshock therapy literally saved my life. After three months in a private psychiatric institution I was sent home, where, in spite of changes in medication and increased doctor visits, I simply

could not cope, and found temporary relief by way of an overdose that rendered me unconscious but near death.

Back at the institution, my doctor started me on higher doses of medication in hopes of breaking the grip of this suicidal depression, but sustainable relief came only after my doctor administered ten electroshock treatments over the course of three weeks. I was no longer agitated or anxious. The depression that almost took my life finally became manageable after more than a year of struggle. Eventually it would dissipate, leaving me to finish my schooling, marry, raise two children, and enjoy a successful career.

Did I suffer a loss of memory? Of course. A little or a lot? Doesn't matter. Was it a fair tradeoff? Unquestionably. If needed, would I undergo such therapy again, or encourage others to? Without hesitation.

*Cathy McCulloch
New Milford, Conn.*

I read "Shock and Disbelief" with great hope, thinking that surely Daniel Smith would have unearthed some scientific evidence that ECT benefits patients. There were the usual anecdotes and testimonials, as can be found for any therapy throughout the history of medicine. But not a word about randomized studies or other means of determining the actual efficacy of ECT as compared with no treatment or with any other form of treatment for depression. Is ECT just a high-voltage placebo effect?

*Thomas A. Preston, M.D.
Professor of Medicine
University of Washington
Seattle, Wash.*

The one and only mission of the Committee for Truth in Psychiatry is to advocate truthful informed consent to ECT. We take no position on

any other issue, including whether or not ECT should be banned. We do not make the claims that are attributed to us in "Shock and Disbelief." Our work does not include the activities Smith describes, such as instigating lawsuits.

The article portrays us as a bunch of crazies who oppose ECT for no reason other than that we are irrational anti-ECT, anti-psychiatry fanatics. To do this, Smith has to omit the most-important material facts: that all of our members had ECT, that we all have permanent memory loss, and that none of us were told of this possibility when we gave our consent. He also had to omit any mention of the actual work we do—for instance, we were instrumental in getting the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates ECT machines, to acknowledge that ECT's adverse effects include brain damage and memory loss, and we have worked to keep the ECT device in the FDA's highest-risk category, Class III, where it stands today.

Smith also had to invert the truth to make his speculations about my current mental health. I am not mentally ill. I haven't had a symptom or a diagnosis, seen a shrink, or taken a single psych pill in more than sixteen years. Nor have I ever in my life been committed or "recommitted" to a mental hospital.

When Smith writes, "Andre, Sackeim says, has shown him her medical records; he says that she may have experienced a similar breakdown" (to that which left a nameless mental patient allegedly unable to hold a job at a fast-food restaurant), he leads the reader to the conclusions that I showed Harold Sackeim my medical records and that these records, apparently psychiatric records, show that I am disabled by mental illness. Both conclusions are false.

The truth is this: the only personal

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record I ever showed Sackeim, many years after shock, was the neuropsychological report attributing my brain damage to ECT. Smith knew what this report said—he reports its finding that my IQ dropped dramatically after ECT. He simply left out its further finding that the loss was due to ECT. Smith suggests, inferentially, that I am one of only a very few ECT survivors who have suffered loss of intelligence and devastating permanent amnesia. Hundreds of such cases are documented in the FDA files and medical journals.

On what basis does Smith assure his readers that electroshock is “safe”? He cites no evidence, not a single safety study. Has he reviewed the research of the past sixty years, and is he qualified to discredit the human and animal evidence for brain damage? Has he conducted his own studies? Has he reviewed all forty volumes of the FDA files, as I have? His quoted experts Max Fink, Sackeim, and Charles Kellner have never done safety studies. As for effectiveness, Smith either doesn’t know or chose not to mention that even the industry concedes that ECT has no benefit that lasts for more than four weeks.

Linda Andre
New York, N.Y.

Daniel Smith replies:

Linda Andre correctly notes that the Committee for Truth in Psychiatry is devoted to advocating for informed consent. Nothing in the section of my article concerning CTIP states that CTIP’s mission is to abolish electroconvulsive therapy or that the organization files lawsuits. At the outset of the article I observed that a number of activist groups, taken collectively, were engaged in a whole range of activities (making a public case against ECT, agitating politically for curbs on ECT, instituting lawsuits), and Andre may have taken this to mean that every group is engaged in all the activities. CTIP’s declared mission is to lobby for improved informed consent, a commitment that arises out of its belief that ECT “works” by damaging the brain and that this information is withheld from patients by psychiatrists. That all members of CTIP have experienced ECT is clearly stated in the article.

The article neither states nor implies

that Andre is now mentally ill. As for the chronology of Andre’s past hospitalizations, the paragraph was read to her word for word; she made one small correction, which was incorporated in the printed text. In my interview with her Andre reported that she was given ECT at New York Hospital’s Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic in 1984, and that she had been “locked up” and “treated against [her] will.”

As for Harold Sackeim, I reported what he told me—that Andre had shown him her medical records. I did not specify which records he had seen, nor did I imply that Andre’s loss of IQ, which she herself told me about, was a result of mental illness. I have not seen the neuropsychology report that Andre refers to, and therefore cannot comment on its findings.

I did not suggest that Andre is one of a very few ECT patients who have experienced a profound loss of memory. In fact, I stated in my article that memory loss is a significant issue, and I observed critically that psychiatrists long played down the possibility of such a side effect. I also noted that the report published this year by the APA Committee on ECT contains that organization’s first substantial discussion of the possibility of serious memory problems. However, patients reporting this level of cognitive impairment represent only a small percentage of patients who receive ECT.

In characterizing ECT as “safe,” I was reporting the views of many psychiatric experts, and also the views of many ECT patients—that ECT does not injure the brain. As in the treatment I described, ECT is now administered as safely as any other medical procedure. Bodily injury, which once was common, is now extremely rare.

Are the benefits of ECT limited? I state that it is not a cure but a useful treatment, with limitations, for severe mental illness. ECT is used on many occasions to pull patients out of a severe illness when other treatments have failed, or when quick relief is needed to save a patient’s life; since relapse is indeed common, often medication or “maintenance” ECT is necessary thereafter.

Interested readers can find more commentary by Linda Andre in the Science section of Post & Riposte, on The Atlantic’s Web site at forum.theatlantic.com.

Casablanca

This note will surely be lost in a fog of corrective correspondence about Casablanca’s “unforgettable” closing airport scene, but here goes: Peter Berkowitz (“Wooed by Freedom?,” October *Atlantic*) is wrong to say that Keith Angus (Letters, February *Atlantic*) was right to say that Rick does not shoot Major Strasser. Rick does. Berkowitz is right to say that Angus is wrong to say that the French police captain Louis’s ensuing command to “round up the usual suspects” is cynical. But Berkowitz is only half right to say that Louis’s order represents the triumph of “friendship over cynicism.” It also—at least as important—represents the triumph of moral integrity over convenience. Louis, finally, does the right thing. But if he had shot Strasser, as both Angus and Berkowitz remember it, his famous command would have been merely self-serving, and we wouldn’t have had much of a picture to not forget.

Kelly Garrett
Santa Cruz, Calif.

I am shocked, shocked! that both Peter Berkowitz and Keith C. Angus are wrong about who shot Major Strasser at the end of *Casablanca*. I refer them to scene 278A of the screenplay (page 156 of the original typewritten version), which I quote in its entirety:

“RICK: Put it down.

“Strasser, his one hand with the receiver, pulls out a pistol with the other hand and shoots quickly at Rick. The bullet misses its mark. Rick now shoots at Strasser, who crumples to the ground.”

Louis Wynne
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

Peter Berkowitz replies:

The mind plays tricks even with the unforgettable. I am grateful to Kelly Garrett and Louis Wynne for setting the record straight about who shot Major Strasser, which has the additional happy consequence of strengthening the original point in my essay: in Bogart’s Rick love and nobility are united in a way that seems quite out of fashion yet continues to touch our hearts.



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Indoctrinologists

The most important aspect of Sally Satel's "The Indoctrinologists Are Coming" (January *Atlantic*) is its slighting of scientific studies documenting disparities in the treatment of African-American and Hispanic patients, which suggest physician bias and stereotyping, however unconscious.

An example: Satel's consideration of coronary-artery and other heart disease. Two recent searches of the relevant medical literature have identified and examined 170 articles on racial and ethnic disparities in treatment in this category alone. All but a handful described inferior treatment for minority patients, ranging from failure to provide clinically needed bypass surgery to the omission of clot-busting and other recommended drugs—even aspirin—for African-American as compared with white heart-attack victims. These are studies of real patients with real diseases in real hospitals, not the make-believe patients in the one study Satel appears to have read. They compare black and white patients matched for insurance coverage, severity and stage of disease, presence or absence of other disease, income, education, age, and other important variables.

Satel asserts that medical and public-health leaders display a "stubborn reluctance to acknowledge that each person has some responsibility for preserving his or her own health." Has she not noticed the enormous efforts being made in health education and preventive medicine relating to diet, tobacco and other drug use, and regular exercise? Is she unaware of the studies showing that these personal behaviors, important as they are, account for only about a third of the differences in health status of different population groups—leaving the other two thirds to be found among the very social, racial, and economic factors that she wants us to quit studying?

The National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine—arguably the most distinguished group of clinicians, basic-science researchers, public-health officials, and other experts in the nation—has concluded that "public health is what we as a society do collectively to assure the conditions in which peo-

ple can be healthy." That is not political correctness; it is medical and social correctness.

*H. Jack Geiger, M.D.
Arthur C. Logan Professor of
Community Medicine, Emeritus
CUNY Medical School
New York, N.Y.*

Sally Satel replies:

H. Jack Geiger is utterly wrong in saying that I want researchers to quit studying social correlates of health. I only urge that the work be scientifically rigorous and the interpretations uncontaminated with political activism.

I also hope that the public will be skeptical in the face of the media's tendency to trumpet weak evidence as proof of gross racial prejudice. That is exactly what happened with the Schulman study and why I wrote about it. Though it was a well-designed, experimental observational study of doctors' treatment patterns, an erroneous interpretation of its findings—namely, that blacks were 40 percent less likely to be referred for cardiac catheterization—made headlines claiming discrimination in medicine.

*I cannot comment on all 170 studies Geiger cites, but let's just take one he mentions about bypass surgery and aspirin. That study appeared in the journal *Circulation* last August. It showed a two percent difference in aspirin-prescribing—a small difference. It also showed a seven percent black-white difference in receipt of invasive procedures. But a close reading of the study suggests two possible explanations for the latter. First, black patients may have had less supplemental health insurance. Second, the black patient group most likely contained a disproportionate number of females, and female patients of any race are less likely than males to undergo invasive cardiac procedures. Clearly, I differ with Dr. Geiger's thinking that the discrepancies are obvious examples of bias, especially when other variables are yet to be explained. In other instances it is reasonable to consider bias as a hypothesis, but that is what it is: a hypothesis.*

I vigorously applaud the efforts of the public-health profession to encourage people to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, those very efforts have extended and improved millions of lives. The indoctrinologists, in contrast, are often dismissive of personal responsibility, sometimes even contemptuous of it. Consider, for example, the com-

*ments of Stephen Bezrukhka, of the University of Washington School of Public Health. In so mainstream a venue as *Newsweek* (February 26, 2001) he says, "Research during this last decade has shown that the health of a group of people is not affected substantially by individual behaviors such as smoking, diet and exercise ... our primary goal should be to reduce today's record gap between rich and poor." A worthy goal for politicians, yes—not for health professionals, who must keep their eyes on practical interventions.*

French Protestants

In the article "Province of the Past," by Peter Davison (January *Atlantic*), the author is way off the mark in writing that Protestants from southern France were exiled to "Quebec or New Orleans." Under the Bourbon monarchy Protestants were forbidden from migrating to French colonies. That's why French-Canadians, whose ancestors crossed the Atlantic from 1608 to 1759, are traditionally all Catholics, and why there's such a large percentage of Catholics in southern Louisiana (virtually all the people of French or Spanish descent). French "Huguenots" (Protestants) were more likely to go to the Netherlands, Prussia, South Carolina, or Capetown. As for the Occitan spoken in southern France, it never was used in the American Colonies, where 90 percent of the French came from the northwestern part of France, mainly Normandy, Brittany, and Poitou.

*André Pelchat
Victoriaville, Quebec*

Peter Davison replies:

As happens far too often, an American writer has proved his ignorance of Canadian history. I apologize for my error and thank André Pelchat for correcting it.

Correction:

*The January Letters to the Editor included one from Stanley A. Plotkin, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania, regarding Jon Cohen's article "The Hunt for the Origin of AIDS" (October *Atlantic*). The name of Dr. Plotkin's co-signer, Bette Korber, of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Santa Fe Institute, was inadvertently omitted. We regret the error.*

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INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by CULLEN MURPHY

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

People talk about a lack of leadership—but leadership seems to be everywhere

.....

Not long ago, during a trip to Albuquerque, I had the chance to attend a basketball game at the University of New Mexico's fabled underground arena, The Pit. I was in the company of my fourteen-year-old son, Tim, and as the Lobos had their shoot-around before the game, Tim pointed out a certain player and gave me a brief history of his run-ins with the National Collegiate Athletic Association, an entity often described as "the governing body of college sport." This led to a more generalized philippic against the uneven justice and perceived hypocrisy of the NCAA on such matters as recruiting and eligibility. I noticed that the phrase "the governing body of college sport" began to be used with a distinctly ironic inflection.

As the commentary continued, the University of New Mexico Spirit Group—that is, the cheerleaders—skipped onto the floor. Some schools (Alabama, Georgia State, Jacksonville State) offer scholarships for cheerleading, and I couldn't help wondering whether cheerleaders run into the kinds of issues that basketball players do. Are they lured to particular schools with dubious incentives? Are any of them performing at the college level despite a previous stint in the pros? Do other students write their term papers?

Apparently not, I eventually learned. But cheerleaders do have a governing body of their own: the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors. And the AACCA has laid down strict rules. "Toe pitch, leg pitch or walk-in and 'smoosh' front and back flips are prohibited." "Single based split catches are prohibited." The AACCA

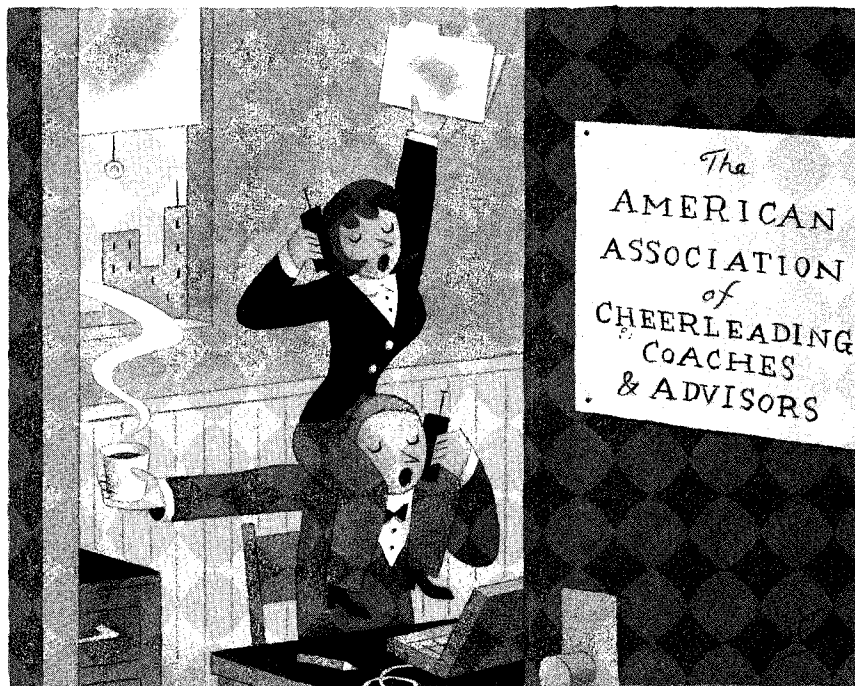
provides a toll-free number to call "if you have any questions regarding the legality of a specific skill."

This is not, clearly, a governing body to be trifled with.

Human beings first learned to walk on two feet; then they mastered fire; after that, anthropologists tell us, they invented bylaws and elected a recording secretary. By now governing

gic Initiatives, headed by Karl Rove, is likely to become the governing body for the Bush Administration's political machinations all across the land.

By definition, many governing bodies are occupied with the tasks of government. The old names roll across the tongue like poetry: althing, majlis, junta, durbar, дума, cortes, divan, troika, witan. Some are never seen in public without an adjectival aide-de-camp.



bodies are the most abundant institutions we have—they are the junk DNA of social organization. Every day brings word of their doings. In November the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers—the governing body that oversees domain names—voted to introduce seven new suffixes, including .info, .biz, and .pro. In January the Book-of-the-Month Club revealed that it would soon bring back to life its famous panel of literary judges. At the White House a new entity, with the unrevealing name Office of State-

The papal curia, the governing body of the Holy See, is always "inscrutable" or "impenetrable." The Komiteh, which enforces Islamic regulations in Iran, is always "the fearsome Komiteh." Ethiopia was long ruled by something called the Derg, generally referred to in conjunction with "shadowy." The very sound of the name "Derg" suggests that if ever called before it, you would look in vain in your Amharic phrasebook for the words "due process." The collapse of communism has brought the demise of many government organs ("the rul-

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ing politburo”), but some totalitarian bodies persist—for example, the condo association.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed that Americans can’t resist bringing the procedures of government into their private affairs. Livestock branding, boiler inspecting, kosher labeling, roller-blading, movie rating, body piercing, standardized testing—there seems to be a governing body for everything. Even the Jehovah’s Witnesses, long resistant to traditional forms of church hierarchy, have a governing body (it’s called, appropriately, The Governing Body). The federal government, of course, remains our largest single repository of governing bodies. Utter a place name, and you’re under the purview of the United States Board on Geographic Names, the group responsible for a near total official ban on apostrophes. (“Martha’s Vineyard” is one of only four exceptions.) Employ a ramp or curb cut, and you’re under the purview of the federal Access Board. But the fastest growth of governing bodies is in the private sector, and it affects everyone. The computer typefaces that most of us use derive from an in-house group at Microsoft, which developed a governing body of Character Design Standards. An educational body called the Incoming Calls Management Institute serves, in effect, as the procedural arbiter of the “call center” industry. That is, it promotes standards for the people who answer the phones whenever a customer-service number is dialed. (The institute’s Web site includes a glossary in which the definition of the term “Average Speed of Answer” begins with the words “Also called Average Delay.”)

Governing bodies acquire heightened mystique when their names conceal the influence they wield. For years the real power in Boston was said to be held by a corporate cabal known as The Vault. Dancers in the movie *Strictly Ballroom* look over their shoulders at the omnipotent and vaguely menacing entity called The Federation. A low-profile group in New York, the Color Association of the United States, turns out to be the de facto arbiter of color choices from season to season in the fashion industry. The name of the Texas Railroad Commission gives no hint of its control over the oil,

gas, and mining industries in the state; nor is it obvious that the Congregation of the Index, now disbanded, was the censorship arm of the inscrutable papal curia. The Trilateral Commission is believed by some on the fringe to be secretly ruling the world. Who would ever have guessed it from the unprepossessing name?

Lawlessness and subterfuge may elude conventional regulation, but they, too, demand order. The governing body of the Sicilian mafia is the cupola. The analogue in America is “the commission.” In Russia it’s *bratsky krug*, the “circle of brothers.” (The Russian underworld has promulgated its own distinctive code of ethics. Rule No. 3: “A Thief is forbidden to work; a Thief must live off the fruits of criminal activity only.” Rule No. 11: “A Thief must not enter a card game if he does not have the money to pay.”) James Bond frequently confronted SPECTRE, the governing body of international mayhem, whose acronym stands for Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion. (Colonel Rosa Klebb, the woman with the poisonous blade in her orthopedic shoe, was SPECTRE’s Agent 3; she had previously worked for SMERSH, where she headed the Second Department, the governing authority for “operations and executions.”) Even an enterprise committed to chaos may require a certain amount of practical direction. C. K. Chesterton’s novella *The Man Who Was Thursday* introduces the Central Anarchist Council, which has convened to elect a new member.

“What do you call this tremendous President of yours?”

“We generally call him Sunday,” replied Gregory with simplicity. “You see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his admirers Bloody Sunday.”

And then there are those immaterial governing bodies that regulate the most intimate forms of personal behavior. Freud postulated the existence of the id, the ego, and the superego—a constitutional system with an American-style separation of powers. An older notion goes by the name personal conscience—

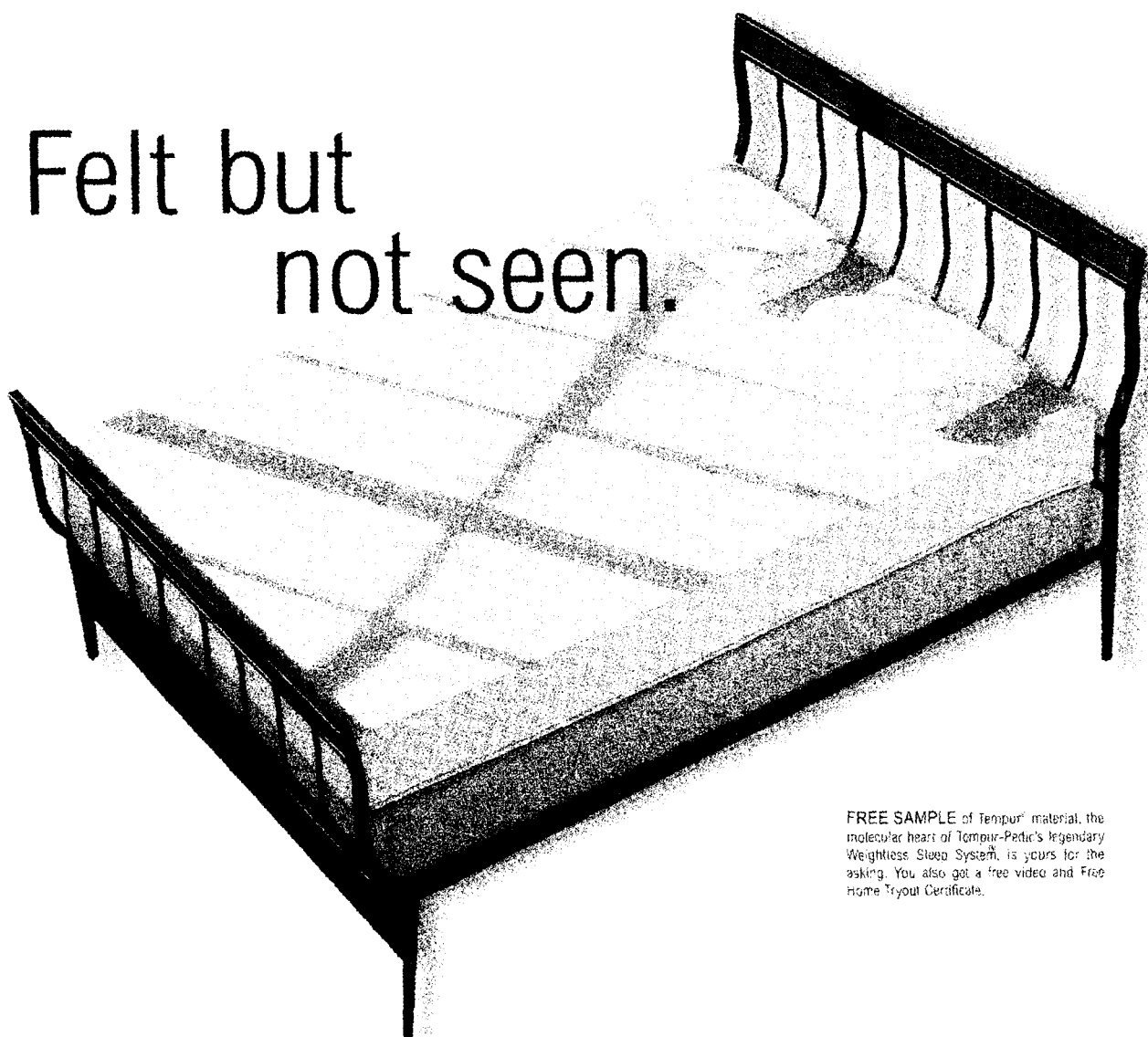
“consciousness of an interior court of justice,” as Immanuel Kant defined it. Conscience can be a wise and discerning tribunal, but it is also one in which the powers to prosecute and pardon have been lodged in a single magistrate.

If every facet of the world’s business is presided over by some sort of governing body, why doesn’t the world work better than it does? One explanation is that some governing bodies don’t function very well. Another is that governing bodies often act at cross-purposes. But a third explanation may be that many governing bodies have been given the wrong things to govern. It’s not hard to imagine how a little switching around could produce some improvements.

For instance, the Incoming Calls Management Institute currently helps businesses handle difficult phone calls from consumers. Wouldn’t it be better if the institute instead helped consumers to handle annoying calls from businesses? (It’s the Access Board that should be running those customer-service phone banks.) Character Design Standards may be great for typefaces, but something with the same name might better be applied to candidates for public office. College athletics is long overdue for a change of governance; putting SPECTRE in charge could well be the answer. To be sure, counterintelligence, terrorism, revenge, and extortion account for only a portion of the college-sports industry, but SPECTRE’s reputation for evenhanded enforcement of the rules would be welcome. (The notion of “elimination” in tournament play would also acquire added interest.) Finally, I think we can all agree that the authority of conscience is too frequently undermined by hypocrisy or lassitude. The operations of conscience would surely be improved if they were enforced by the shadowy Derg.

Needless to say, that suggestion is meant to apply to the governance of other people’s consciences. As to my own, I’d like one of those emergency AACCA toll-free numbers for “questions regarding the legality” of a specific act. And as for institutional oversight, the Central Anarchist Council might work just fine. ▀

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NOTES & DISPATCHES

ROME

ONE ESTABLISHMENT MEETS ANOTHER

Avery Dulles's long journey to the Catholic cardinalate

.....

Ecce sacerdos magnus qui in diebus suis placuit Deo," the choir sang: "Behold the great priest who in his day has pleased the Lord."

It was very much a Roman afternoon, softer and warmer than even the Italians expected for February. And it was very much a Roman place: Gesù e Maria, a high-Baroque church designed by Carlo Rainaldi for the Augustinians in 1670, out along the Via del Corso toward the old city gate, a block below the Piazza del Popolo. Into that ornate riot of Roman taste—where gold-gowned priests and mitered bishops bowed beneath the bronze and marble, the gilded crucifixes and glowing frescoes—walked Avery Dulles, the great priest, as tall and thin as a split rail, with a face of sharp-cornered granite. He looked as much the opposite of Baroque Rome as it is possible to imagine. He looked like stern New England, deep in winter.

He looked like what he is: eighty-two years old and the end of a long line of American Presbyterians; the last heir of the old northeastern American establishment, incongruously turned Jesuit priest and dressed in the scarlet cassock, sash, and mozzetta of a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. The ceremony at which Dulles took possession of Gesù e Maria, his titular church, was held on February 23, the third day of celebrations in Rome for Cardinal Dulles—the first American theologian ever raised to the cardinalate.

In January, when Pope John Paul II announced the latest elevations, three Americans were on the list. The first

two, Edward Egan and Theodore McCarrick, the recently named archbishops of New York and Washington, were no surprise. How could the head of a major American archdiocese *not* become a cardinal these days? Besides, Egan and McCarrick are Irish, like most of the Church hierarchy in the United States. One can read in their faces the history of American Catholicism—primarily a tale of Irish immigration, struggle, and rise to wealth and power, with the Italians and now the Hispanics in supporting roles.

In Avery Cardinal Dulles's face one can read the history of the other world—the world from which those Irishmen long felt excluded. It wasn't

President Benjamin Harrison's Secretary of State. His great-uncle, Robert Lansing, was Woodrow Wilson's. His father, John Foster Dulles, was Dwight Eisenhower's. His uncle, Allen Dulles, headed the CIA from 1953 to 1961. His aunt, Eleanor Dulles, wielded influence as a State Department officer and a Washington hostess.

And behind that modern establishment stood earlier American establishments: the long line of New England intellectuals who discovered transcendentalism in the pages of Emerson, the longer line of Protestant ministers who preached Calvinism from the Second Book of Kings. Avery's grandfather, Allen Macy Dulles, had been a Presbyterian

pastor and a co-founder of the American Theological Society. John Foster Dulles—coming to believe that only the Gospels and international organization could preserve world order—gained wide notice as an expert on international affairs by chairing a 1941 peace commission for the Federal Council of Churches.

Still, Avery Dulles described himself as an agnostic when he arrived at Harvard as an undergraduate, in 1936. The subsequent decade was a time of prominent Catholic conversions, particularly intellectual and literary ones.

Thomas Merton gave the classic account of those days in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), the tale of his progress from Columbia University to a Trappist monastery. But even for his generation, Dulles's conversion was curiously intellectual. It began when he decided that Catholic philosophy provided a more complete account of the world than others did. Acceptance of the philosophy



simply money and status that the Dulleses possessed (though, Lord knows, they had enough). Their primary gift was assurance. Behind them, like perpetual graces, stood Princeton and Harvard, weekends on sailboats, grand tours, a house out on Long Island, a summer place upstate, the Navy, the foreign service. Avery Dulles's great-grandfather, John Watson Foster, was

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STAN FELLOWS

compelled acceptance of the theology, which in turn compelled acceptance of the faith—except, of course, that intellectually accepting faith isn't the same as actually having faith.

But then, in 1939, “on one grey February afternoon ... in Widener Library,” Dulles wrote in his conversion memoir, *A Testimonial to Grace* (1946),

I was irresistibly prompted to go out into the open air ... The slush of melting snow formed a deep mud along the banks of the River Charles, which I followed down toward Boston ... As I wandered aimlessly, something impelled me to look contemplatively at a young tree. On its frail, supple branches were young buds ... While my eye rested on them, the thought came to me suddenly, with all the strength and novelty of a revelation, that these little buds in their innocence and meekness followed a rule, a law of which I as yet knew nothing ... That night, for the first time in years, I prayed.

By the fall of 1940, in his first year at Harvard Law School, Dulles was ready to tell his family of his faith and to be received into the Catholic Church. After a tour in the Navy, during which he won the Croix de Guerre for liaison work with the French navy, he returned to Boston in 1946 and joined the Society of Jesus to become a priest.

Over the course of his career Father Dulles, S.J., would write hundreds of theological articles and more than twenty books, mostly in defense of the Second Vatican Council—the work for which the Pope has now rewarded him. The most influential is *Models of the Church* (1974), an attempt to identify diverse understandings of the Christian Church and to define a method of theology that can—under the rubric of “models”—seek harmony among hotly disputed positions.

Dulles's most revealing book, however, may be his first, *Princeps Concordiae: Pico della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition*, published by Harvard University Press in 1941, when Dulles was twenty-two. Pico, a brilliant fifteenth-century Italian philosopher who died at age thirty-one, is typically an undergraduate's hero. Like Dulles himself (like nearly all precocious young

men), Pico seemed to have intellectual conviction before actual faith. “He was not very diligent in the observation of external ceremonies,” his nephew dryly noted. But for his attempt to roll everything from Aristotelian logic to Egyptian astrology into a unified Christian humanism, he was known by his contemporaries as the “prince of concord.”

And concord has never been far from Dulles's mind since. Explaining the liberalism of Vatican II to an old generation that had experienced only the unified, pre-conciliar Church, he became a leader for liberal Catholics in the 1970s. Explaining the conservatism of Vatican II to a new generation that had experienced only the fragmented, post-conciliar Church, he became something of a leader for conservative Catholics in the 1990s. But always it was the centrality of the council that he set himself to explain.

Indeed, his objection to radical theology is, finally, that the people who practice it wreck theology. There is no idea so wild that it cannot be assigned a place in Dulles's system of theological models. But radicals—of both the revisionist left and the revisionist right—refuse to be accommodated in this way. They don't want to be in the Church; they want to *be* the Church. And that, as Dulles observes, is what makes them so “uncivil.” The intellectual roiling of the Catholic Church after Vatican II made for Avery Dulles a world far different from that of his fathers: different in class, different in faith, different in ideas. But once again a Dulles was there to see that the center held.

At the Vatican consistory, the outdoor ceremony held on February 21 to create the latest set of cardinals, Avery Dulles was the last to kneel before the Pope. After placing his square, brimless red hat, called a biretta, atop the skullcap known as a zucchetto, he stood up—and then, realizing he hadn't shared the traditional kiss with the Pope, he bent down in his tall, awkward, American way and accidentally dropped his biretta in John Paul II's lap.

At that moment the Roman crowd fell in love with the least Roman of the

new cardinals. Dulles led Italian newscasts that evening and was cheered at mass in St. Peter's Square the next day. At a dinner in his honor he joked that he hadn't let his red hat go to his head. Everywhere he went, Romans lined up to kiss his ring.

Mostly he seemed to be having fun, as if he were launched on a great adventure—as great an adventure, maybe, as a family member has had since 1953, when his father became Secretary of State and practiced his dangerous brinkmanship in the great crusade of the Cold War. Or maybe since 1946, when his aunt Eleanor, wheeling and dealing in occupied Austria, fed the starving people of Vienna by trading the famous Lippizaner stallions to the U.S. Cavalry for trainloads of food. Or maybe since 1942, when the Nazis' seizure of Vichy France left his uncle Allen cut off in Switzerland, with nothing but \$1 million and perhaps the greatest spy network ever built.

Or maybe since all the way back in 1939, when a young man in Widener Library put down his philosophy book and walked out to look at the trees along the Charles. —J. BOTTUM

SAN SALVADOR

GETTING USED TO THE GREENBACK

The peculiar hitches of a growing Third World trend: conversion to the dollar

.....

Shocks both natural and unnatural have long plagued El Salvador, a country so tectonically volatile that its capital city has been destroyed ten times in the past 400 years. At least twelve major earthquakes shook El Salvador during the twentieth century. And in this century disaster did not wait long to strike: two weeks into the new year a quake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale leveled much of the country, killing almost a thousand people.

Shortly before the January earthquake El Salvador experienced one of its unnatural shocks—“dollarization.” Last November 23 Salvadorans awoke to the announcement that the gov-

ernment had decided to phase out the colon, the unit of national currency, named after Christopher Columbus. Starting on January 1 the U.S. greenback would become the country's primary legal tender. Those colones still in existence would be honored at banks and businesses, but it was hoped and expected that they would shortly disappear.

Arriving in San Salvador a week after dollarization took effect, I found little enthusiasm for the new policy. Although the government had been toying with the idea for several years, its decision was closely guarded, and few saw it coming. In bars and banks and at the airport people could be seen holding the new bills up to the light, turning them this way and that as they scrutinized the cryptic imagery and the portrait gallery of American leaders.

While strolling down the Boulevard of Heroes, a smog-choked fast-food strip, I met two women who were clearly struggling with the new system. Roxana and Josefina were selling roses beneath a rattling overpass. Roxana took out a handful of change and asked me the value of a particular coin. Glancing at it quickly, I told her it was a silver dollar.

"Really?" she asked. "Are you sure? It doesn't have a number."

Looking again, I realized that the coin was actually a fifty-cent piece—and that numerals of value appear nowhere on U.S. coins. "Sorry," I mumbled sheepishly. "That one's sort of rare even in our own country." Roxana and Josefina laughed and said they would continue doing business in colones for as long as they could.

Luis Membreno, the business editor of the daily *La Prensa Grafica*, told me that adapting to the dollar poses particular problems for the 20 percent or more of the population that cannot read or even distinguish numbers. Sitting in his modestly decorated office near the banking district, Membreno removed a wad of money from his wallet. "This is twenty-five colones," he

said, holding up a bill. "See, it's blue. This is two hundred—red. Using the old system, you did not have to be able to read to know what you were getting. Dollars were not designed that way, so they will take some getting used to. Right now people are afraid to use dollars. They're afraid they're going to get tricked."

Or that they might crash a bus. One night during my stay a city bus driver interviewed on local television argued that he would be so busy doing calculations—at the awkward official exchange rate of 8.75 colones to the dollar—that the safety of his passengers would be compromised. "Why couldn't they have chosen an easier number?" he complained. To spare themselves the math, many Salvadorans took to carrying a page clipped from *La Prensa*



Grafica that contained a handy table listing multiples of 8.75. Others, including the members of the largest union of bus drivers, declared that they would refuse to accept dollars.

To make matters worse, the media began running stories alleging that the country was being inundated by counterfeit dollars—fake fifties, twenties, even fives, totaling millions. Although the government denied the reports, they were cause for great alarm on the street: for the average Salvadoran getting duped by a bogus twenty would mean losing half a week's wages. It soon became impossible to find any business that would accept bills larger than a twenty.

After returning to the United States, I spoke with Alex Echo, a Secret Service agent based in Miami, who had headed a team sent to El Salvador to investigate the reports of counterfeit bills. Echo downplayed the rumors of a counterfeiting wave. He knew of only one "dollar factory" that had been found in El Salvador—whereas in Colombia, he said, such factories are discovered every week (large numbers of their bills turn up in Los Angeles, among other places). Still, Echo said, a surge in counterfeiting was a risk that came with dollarization. "Counterfeiting used to be done to fool the exchange houses. You did it with large bills—fifties, hundreds. Now you have an entire population inexperienced with using dollars, and your target is the street."

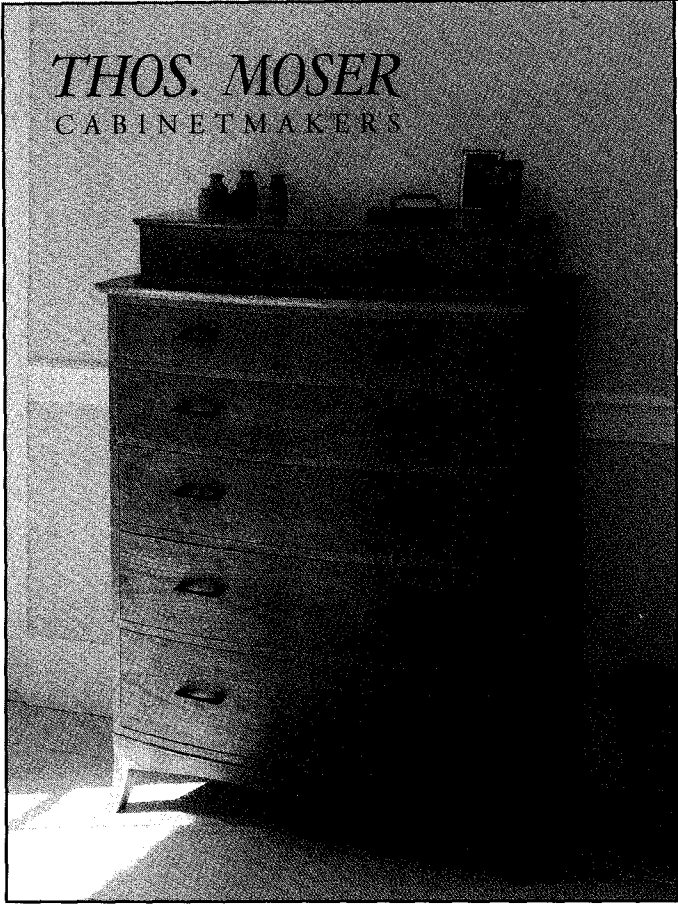
Of course, in time the flower sellers and the bus drivers and everyone else will become proficient with the new currency. El Salvador is not the first country to switch to the dollar, nor is it likely to be the last. Panama has been dollarized for almost a century, Ecuador made the change last year, and Argentina essentially leaves its monetary policy to Alan Greenspan, so tightly is its peso anchored to the dollar. Guatemala may be next, having already approved the use of dollars in addition to its own currency, the quetzal. In Russia and in Mexico the dollar is often preferred—though not legally sanctioned—because the local currency has a history of volatility. Some economists believe that several decades from now the world will have only a handful of central banks. Ricardo Hausmann, a former chief economist at the Inter-American Development Bank, is among this group. "The idea that each country should have its own currency is very much an idea of the twentieth century," he told me recently. "It wasn't so in the nineteenth century, and it probably won't be in the twenty-first." Hausmann argued that in an age of global economic shakeups and speculative attacks on currencies, few developing nations can handle the intricacies of monetary policy. Better, he said, to take shelter with a powerhouse like the euro

or the dollar. "What we are seeing is just the beginning," Hausmann said. "Once a country makes the change, its neighbors have an incentive to follow, so that they can trade more freely with one another."

But a government that dollarizes can risk unpopularity or worse. In Ecuador the proposal to switch to the dollar, announced in January of last year, proved to be a political last straw, prompting military officials to back an already active opposition and overthrow President Jamil Mahuad. (Mahuad's successor, Gustavo Noboa, moved ahead with dollarization without losing his office.) In El Salvador, predictably enough, the chief opposition party—the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), an outgrowth of the rebels who fought a twelve-year civil war against the U.S.-backed government—accused President Francisco Flores of selling out to economic imperialism. The FMLN filed a lawsuit to try to reverse the currency change and organized protests at which dollars were burned.

There can be economic tradeoffs as well. Because dollarized countries are strictly limited in terms of how much currency they can issue, their inflation rates tend to stabilize. But their exports become more expensive than those from non-dollarized developing countries. Hector Silva, an FMLN leader and the mayor of San Salvador, points out that both Ecuador and Argentina had to take on hefty "rescue packages" from the International Monetary Fund after, respectively, converting and linking their currency to the dollar. "If my two friends have just eaten a meal that sent them to the hospital, I don't think I will want to share what they have been eating," Silva says.

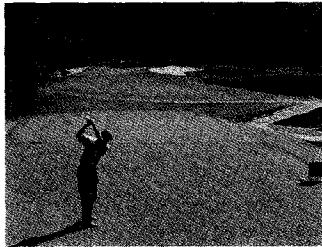
But share it El Salvador has, and there is almost certainly no going back. If by adopting the dollar the government intended to send a message of stability, reverting to the colon would only undermine that message. (Some FMLN leaders appeared to acknowledge this implicitly, by not criticizing the move.) And the idea that the government was selling out to Washington seemed to fall flat with most of the people I spoke to. Returning to my hotel one night, I



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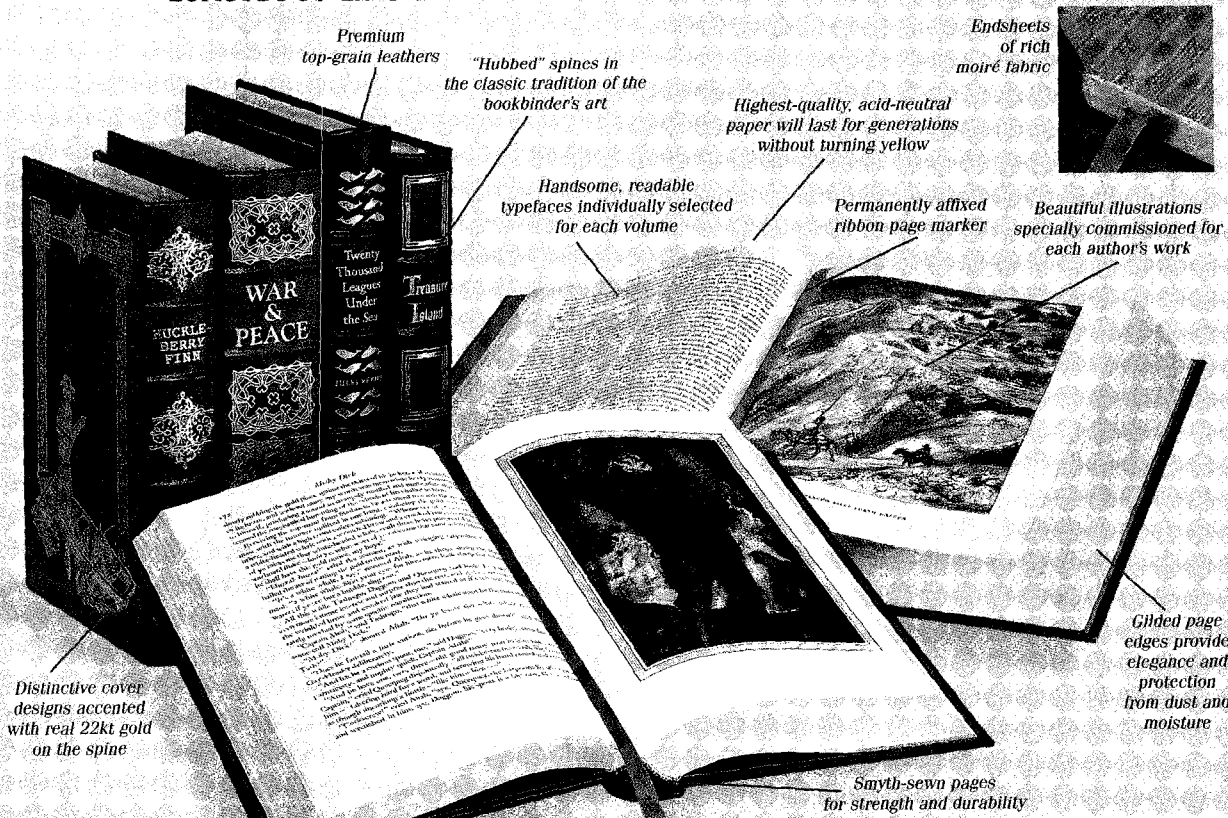


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asked my taxi driver, in Spanish, what he thought of the new currency. He leaned over and said, in fluent English, "The colon is a symbol, just like the dollar. Can you imagine if America had to use the colon? But I can tell you this: if the economy is going well a year from now, no one here will care." The driver had once lived in Houston, working at a construction site and sending home \$200 a month. Such remittances have become the backbone of El Salvador's economy; last year they totaled \$1.6 billion, or about 11 percent of the gross domestic product. Arguably, it is the Salvadorans themselves, rather than their President, who brought about dollarization. —BENJAMIN RYDER HOWE

PORTLAND, OREGON

**BYTE, BYTE,
AGAINST THE DYING
OF THE LIGHT**

*A new senior-care facility
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.....

Whenever Harold Taylor rolls his wheelchair into his bedroom or crosses his two-room suite to take another wistful look at the photograph of his deceased wife, Elsie, his movements are tracked as though he were a radio-collared elk or a prisoner on house arrest. A badge the size of a credit card, pinned to the lapel of Taylor's shirt, transmits an infrared signal to sensors on the ceiling and walls. The sensors send information to a central computer in his rest home—Oatfield Estates, a new managed-care facility just outside Portland, Oregon—and by touching the WHERE IS EVERYONE? icon on her screen a caregiver can detect that Taylor has moved.

With a few more taps on the screen the caregiver can also ascertain what time Taylor tucks in for the evening, exactly how much he weighs lying in bed (a load cell sits under each bedpost), and whether he's resting peacefully or twisting and turning. She can take his temperature by means of infrared, keep track of how often he rolls in and out of his bedroom, and create

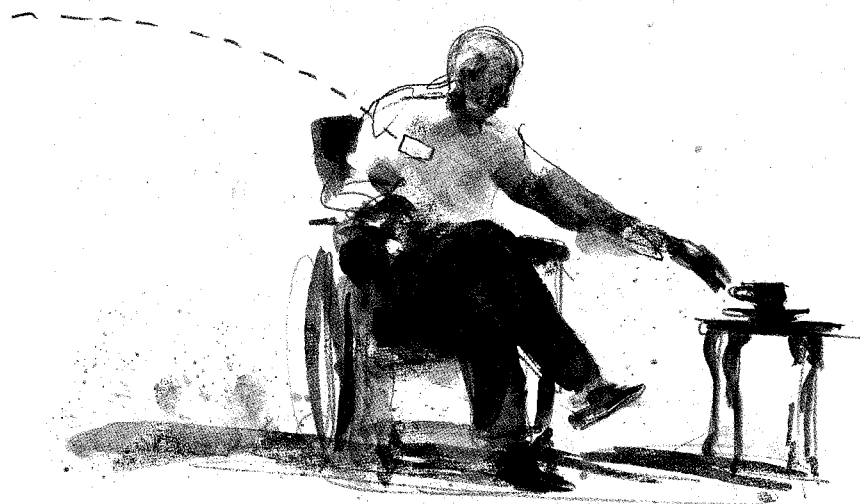
graphs documenting changes in his patterns of movement and in his heart rate and blood pressure. And if Taylor, a former steel-company repairman who is still sharp-witted at the age of ninety-one, should ever develop Alzheimer's, the Oatfield staff need not worry that he'll absentmindedly burn himself on the stove down the hall: the infrared sensors would recognize that he had entered the kitchen, and the burners would lose power at once.

Surveillance has, of course, become part of everyday life in America. Many employers now monitor their employees' telephone conversations. The police plant video cameras on street corners, and direct marketers keep close tabs on where we go on the Web. But each of these activities accounts for only a slice of our existence. Oatfield aims to capture the whole pie. It is the nation's highest-tech senior home and perhaps the first facility of any kind to e-monitor its residents around the clock. And it is continually fine-tuning its surveillance. When I toured Oatfield recently, Bill Pascoe, the architect of the facility's computer system, speculated that Oatfield might soon begin to monitor residents' breathing. "One way to do this is to hang a long, thin microphone over where the person sits, to pick up his sounds," he said. "You'd use a broad, multi-directional mike to pick up the ambient noise, and then you'd subtract the ambient noise and ..." I felt as though I'd entered the world of that ominous Jim Carrey film *The Truman Show*.

But I felt, too, as though I'd entered a homey small town. Opened last fall and still under construction, Oatfield will consist of a cluster of ten wooden bungalows, each containing fifteen suites, situated in the Portland suburb of Milwaukie, on a six-acre hilltop that was once an apple orchard. Each bungalow is designed to serve as an "extended family residence," a multi-generational home that will welcome seniors and allow them to "age in place"—and to garden and cook—while living alongside their caregivers and those caregivers' families.

Oatfield had only two residents when I visited, but still it had a family feel. In the central kitchen in Harold Taylor's bungalow Connie Cooper, a "live-in facilitator," whipped up some sandwiches for lunch. Her sixteen-year-old son, Tim, slouched on a nearby sofa, playing a video game called Perfect Dark; Taylor surveyed the scene in stately silence while he nibbled at some ham. After lunch his daughter dropped by, accompanied by Taylor's beloved Shetland sheepdog, Mandy. Mandy, who is fifteen years old and blind, lolled on a blanket in Taylor's living room. Oatfield's founder, Bill Reed, soon meandered in, wearing jeans and a sweater; he looked at Mandy and grinned.

Reed, who is fifty-two, is a powerfully built, balding Portland developer. He told me that his inspiration for Oatfield was his sprawling childhood home in Connecticut, where he lived with his parents, four brothers, a grand-



mother, and a great-grandmother. "My grandmother baby-sat for us," Reed recalled. "At night one of my brothers and I would help lift my great-grandmother's feet for her as she climbed the stairs to bed." The old women were frail, Reed said, but his mother managed their health deftly. "She had intimate knowledge of them. She knew that if my great-grandmother didn't, say, eat dessert two nights in a row, something was wrong. In the past forty years, as people have stopped living near their parents, we've lost that sort of family memory."

A few years ago Reed decided that he wanted it back. And so, in October of 1998, Oatfield's omniscient computer system, Daughter I, was born. (It was later rechristened CARE, for Creating an Autonomy-Rich Equilibrium.) During the subsequent eighteen months Bill Pascoe, a former systems integrator for a company that makes wastewater-treatment equipment, headed a team that designed ten computer programs that, collectively, enable 180 gigabytes of electronic data—a plethora of personal health stories, an epic detailing seniors' moment-by-moment physical ups and downs—to flow daily over Oatfield's network, which contains some 360 miles of copper wiring.

Reed and Pascoe's undertaking was not only vast; it was also unprecedented. Academics across the country are just now starting to consider electronic monitoring for the elderly. For example, at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh psychiatrists and computer scientists are seeking funds for a project that would videotape sixty dementia patients nonstop for several months. A computer would then select "disruptive vocalizations"—aggressive outbursts and cries for help—for researchers to examine, in part in the hope of finding clues about how dementia works. At the Georgia Institute of Technology computer scientists have built an "Aware Home," in which sensors can monitor residents' movements and conversations. Computers can then digitize the data and send reports about seniors' physical and social conditions to family members off-site. Such technology might allow seniors to delay moving to a

residential-care facility. The project's coordinators will move small groups of senior citizens into the Aware Home for short stays beginning in June.

Reed is not the sort to trifle with such preliminaries. Ever since he graduated from Columbia University, in 1971, he has made a career of following odd, optimistic instincts all over metropolitan Portland. In 1973 he opened one of the nation's first self-service garages, where customers rented repair bays and tools for three dollars an hour. In the 1980s he made millions of dollars by buying 160 abandoned houses in a gang-ridden neighborhood that, as he'd been betting, made a comeback. In 1999 he finished converting an old dairy into a sort of village—a hip warren of apartments adjoining a restaurant and bar, some art galleries, some studios, and an "e-mat" (a laundromat-cum-cybercafé).

Reed has always been a hands-on developer, someone who likes wrenches and bandsaws, and what he most wanted to show me at Oatfield was the "brains room" in Taylor's bungalow—a stark basement closet where more than a thousand colored wires converge amid a few sheets of raw plywood. He extolled the virtues of the control board there, and then explained how the relay switches operate. "The computer basically takes the place of a daughter," he said. "It creates baselines on residents. It can tell caregivers, 'Hey, something's wrong—go check it out,' and it can act as a cognitive crutch. Say we find out that someone with dementia always gets up to go to the bathroom at two in the morning. We can tell the computer to turn on the fan in the bathroom then, to remind him why he got up." Reed cut the lights in the brains room, and we stepped outside into an Oregon drizzle. "The computer allows the elderly a new way to be independent," he said.

It is easy to shudder at Reed's equation of surveillance with freedom. The skeptic in me wonders whether we will all one day be tracked around the clock by infrared, and whether the details of our wanderings will be made available to the marketing department at Wal-Mart.

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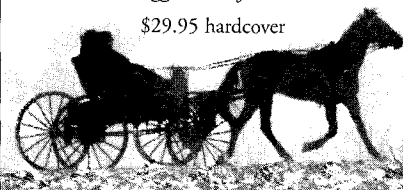
Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren

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The seniors' advocates I spoke with share some of my dread. But they are also hopeful, with Reed, that smart technology will afford old people new freedoms. Roy Green, a lobbyist for AARP, formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons, foresees a day when many seniors can stay in their own homes longer by "telecommuting." "You could set up motion detectors at home, and doctors could monitor you remotely," Green says.

Tim Fuller, the executive director of the Gray Panthers, says, "The thought of being watched gives me chills, but if someone has Alzheimer's, maybe they need electronic monitoring along with care from the family. You can't say that technology is purely good or purely bad. The question is, Are we expanding it ethically and humanely? Currently we don't have any philosophers who are

specifically addressing that question. Health care needs to develop a new ethical analysis, a new base."

In the meantime, Harold Taylor will remain at Oatfield, sleeping an average of 9.65 hours a night and thoroughly enjoying life. When I stepped into his living room late in the afternoon and found him tipped back in his easy chair, Taylor told me that Oatfield was by far the best of the four managed-care facilities he has inhabited. "The meals!" he rhapsodized, his voice soft and a bit scratchy. "The people! The view!"

"But what's your favorite thing?" I asked.

Taylor pointed a quavering finger at his locator badge, which bears a black "help" button, and I thought for a moment that he was going to sing the praises of Oatfield's electronic surveillance. "The service," he said. —BILL DONAHUE

MOGADISHU

AYN RAND COMES TO SOMALIA

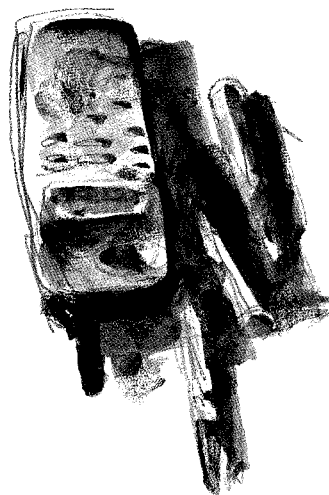
In the absence of government bureaucracy and foreign aid, business is starting to boom

.....

The headquarters of Telecom Somalia is filled with the sights and sounds of Mogadishu-style success. Customers pour through the entrance, funneling past machine-gun positions that flank the front doors. After a pat-down by security guards, who take temporary possession of any guns and knives, they enter the lobby and line up at the appropriate counters to pay their bills or order new service. Clocks on a wall display the time in New York, Paris, London, Sydney, and Karachi—reminders of an outside world that has pretty much left Somalia for dead. Computer keyboards clatter as workers punch in information. Customers chat and argue with one another in a gregarious manner that makes the lobby feel like a town square—all the more so if a goat that's being herded down the street happens to stray inside.

Telecom Somalia is the largest company in Mogadishu. It has 700 employees, and it offers some of the best and cheapest phone service in Africa. It also provides a clue to the possible resusci-

tation of the world's most famous failed state. In 1995, when the international community decided to wash its hands of Somalia and the last United Nations peacekeepers left the country, Mogadishu was a Hobbesian horror show. It remains a miserable and unstable place, a city where taxi drivers ruin their own vehicles, denting the body work and smashing the windows, so that thieves will not bother to steal them. But it is



less dismal than it used to be, and better times may be on the way, owing to a new generation of businessmen who are determined to bring the lawless capital back to life.

Prime among the city's entrepreneurial leaders is Abdulaziz Sheikh, the chief executive of Telecom Somalia. When I visited him last summer, in a small office on the fourth floor of the company's headquarters, he was being blasted by a hurricane-force air-conditioner that nearly drowned out the constantly ringing phones on his desk. "You need to be here twenty-four hours a day," he said, explaining that he lives as well as works on the premises. Sheikh had the running-on-fumes look of a campaign chairman in a never-ending race, but at least he appeared to be winning. Anyone can walk into the lobby of his building, plunk down a \$100 deposit, and leave with a late-model Nokia that works throughout the city, in valleys as well as on hilltops, at all hours. Caller ID, call waiting, conference calling, and call forwarding are available. There are two other cellular-phone firms in town, and the three recently entered into a joint venture and created the first local Internet-service provider. Not all battles here are resolved by murder.

Mogadishu also has new radio and television stations (one night I watched the Somali equivalent of *Larry King Live*, in which the moderator and his guest, one of the city's leading Islamic clerics, fielded questions from callers), along with computer schools and an airport that serves several airlines (although these fly the sorts of airplanes that Americans see only in museums). The city's Bekara market offers everything from toilet paper, Maalox, and Colgate toothpaste to Viagra, sarongs, blank passports (stolen from the Foreign Ministry a decade ago), and assault rifles. The international delivery company DHL has an office in Mogadishu, where its methods can be unorthodox: if a client has an urgent package that cannot wait for a scheduled flight out of the country, the company will dispatch it on one of the many planes that arrive illegally from Kenya every day bearing khat, a narcotic leaf that is chewed like tobacco but has the effect of cocaine.

Mogadishu has the closest thing to an Ayn Rand-style economy that the world has ever seen—no bureaucracy or regulation at all. The city has had no government since 1991, when the much despised President Mohammed Siad Barre was overthrown; his regime was replaced not by another one but by civil war. The northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland have stabilized under autonomous governments, but southern Somalia, with Mogadishu at its core, has remained a *Mad Max* zone carved up by warlords for whom fighting seems as necessary as oxygen. The prospect of stability is a curious miracle, not simply because the kind of business development that is happening tends to require the presence of a government, but because the very absence of a government may have helped to nurture an African oddity—a lean and efficient business sector that does not feed at a public trough controlled by corrupt officials.

Similarly, the lack of large-scale (and often corrupting) foreign aid might have benefits as well as drawbacks. Somali investors are making things happen, not waiting for them to happen. For example, on the outskirts of town, on a plot of land the size of several football fields and surrounded by twenty-foot-high walls, workers recently completed a \$2 million bottling plant. Everyone refers to it as “the Pepsi factory,” even though Pepsi is not involved. The project’s investors say the plant will *become* a Pepsi factory: they figure that if they begin producing soft drinks, Pepsi or some other international company will want to get in on the market.

Many of the larger companies in Mogadishu, including the bottling plant, have issued shares, although there is of course no stock exchange or financial authority of any sort in the city. Everything is based on trust, and so far it has worked, owing to Somalia’s tightly woven clan networks: everyone knows everyone else, so it’s less likely that an unknown con man will pull off a scam. In view of Somalia’s history, this ad hoc stock market is not as implausible as it may sound. Until a century ago, when Italy and Britain divided what is present-day Somalia into colo-



nial fiefdoms, Somalis got along quite well without a state, relying on systems that still exist: informal codes of honor and a means of resolving disputes, even violent ones, through mediation by clan elders.

Of course, the lack of a government poses problems, especially with respect to the warlords. Sheikh and his fellow businessmen have kept them at bay by paying them protection money and by forming their own militias. Those manning the machine guns outside Telecom Somalia are employees of the company, and when the firm’s linemen go out to lay new cables (they used to string overhead lines, but those got shot up by stray gunfire), they, too, are protected by company gunmen.

All of this is costly, so the business leaders have taken steps to bring about a new government—one that will keep its hands out of their pockets and focus on providing security and public services. The process began two years ago, when Sheikh and other entrepreneurs got fed up with the blight of checkpoints, at which everyone was required to pay small tributes to armed teenagers affiliated with various warlords. The businessmen decided collectively to fund a militia to get rid of the checkpoints, resulting in an armed force that is overseen by the city’s Islamic clerics. Having succeeded in its main mission,

the militia now serves as an informal sort of police force, patrolling the streets in an effort to stop petty crime.

With the checkpoints gone and the warlords weakened by the loss of a key source of income, the business elite is bankrolling a transitional government that was appointed at a peace conference last August. The government does not yet control much more than the heavily guarded buildings that are its temporary headquarters, but it has begun deploying its own policemen in some parts of the city. The businessmen are pooling their company security forces to bolster the government and are trying to lure the warlords’ gunmen to its side with cash incentives. In February one of the leading warlords, Mohamed Qanyareh, agreed to support the government in exchange for ministerial posts for himself and his allies.

If the business community succeeds in returning Mogadishu to something resembling normalcy, it will have shown that a failed state, or at least its capital city, can get back on its feet without much help from the outside world. This would constitute not an argument against outside intervention but, rather, a lesson that intervention doesn’t have to be of the UN-led, billion-dollar variety.

Before leaving the city I met with Hussein Abdullahi, a well-educated businessman who fled Mogadishu in 1991 and wound up in Toronto, driving a taxi. Three years ago, during a return visit, he was struck by the fact that his Somali friends were living better at home than he was in Canada, at the bottom of the immigrant ladder. He decided to move back and now manages a thriving pasta factory, a bread factory, and a medical clinic.

Sipping an ice-cold Coke in his office, Abdullahi offered to share a secret that, he promised, could make me rich. A chubby man with a beatific smile, he leaned forward conspiratorially. “Everything is possible in Mogadishu now, everything,” he said. “If you have the money and the knowledge, you can do whatever you want. It is virgin here.”

Perhaps so, but only in the way of scorched earth. —PETER MAASS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE OVAL OFFICE AND THE DIAMOND

*A selective survey
of America's First Fans*

.....

Last October, as George W. Bush waited nervously for his first debate with Al Gore, his adviser Mark McKinnon tried to help him focus by softly whispering in his ear what is something of a mantra for Bush: "Willie Mays, Willie Mays"—the name of Bush's all-time favorite baseball player. Whether or not McKinnon's chanting played a role, Bush went on to win the debate and—more or less—the election. A true baseball lifer is now President of the United States.

Every chief executive except Rutherford B. Hayes has had some encounter with baseball or its forerunners. "No other sport has been so graced by presidential attention," the baseball historians William B. Mead and Paul Dickson wrote in *Baseball: The Presidents' Game* (1993). But George W. Bush is in a league of his own. He is the first President to have played Little League (he was a catcher), the first to have owned a major-league team (he was the managing partner of the group that owned the Texas Rangers from 1989 to 1994), and the first to my knowledge to draw on baseball for his theme music on the campaign trail (John Fogerty's "Centerfield"). When asked, during a primary debate, what his biggest mistake had been, Bush deftly replied with a self-deprecating joke about his days with the Texas Rangers: "I signed off on that wonderful transaction—Sammy Sosa for Harold Baines." Last February, during his first address to a joint session of Congress, he explained his optimistic notion that the federal budget surplus can be used simultaneously to lower taxes, increase education spending, and retire much of the national debt in this way: "Yogi Berra once said, 'When you come to a fork in the road, take it.'" Bush's favorite movie is *Field of Dreams*, which made him cry, he once said, because it reminded him of playing catch in the back yard with his father—

a pretty fair ballplayer himself once. When Bush Jr. moved into the White House, he took the collection of autographed baseballs he had displayed in his Austin office—some 250, far more than the number of books displayed.

It would be stretching matters, but not by much, to say that a President's affinity for America's national game necessarily translates into an understanding of America itself, and therefore into a knack for governing the country. After all, Bill Clinton doesn't really know baseball, but he left office with high job-approval ratings similar to those of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who



surely did. This much, however, can be ventured: the ways in which a President interacts with baseball reveal something about the essential nature of the man.

Before he sabotaged his legacy by getting himself impeached and, on his last day in office, pardoning the fugitive financier Marc Rich, Clinton was known for his acute political instincts. Those instincts led him to associate himself with baseball, but his relationship with the game was never an authentic one (his true love, really, was college basketball). As a reporter I went with Clinton to see the Orioles play in Baltimore on opening day in 1993. A year earlier President Bush the elder had tossed the ceremo-

nial first ball from the mound, only to have it bounce in the dirt before it reached home plate. Clinton, eager to avoid such embarrassment, and willing as always to do his homework, donned an Orioles warm-up jacket and cap and practiced for a while under the stands. Still, he lobbed the ball so softly that it sailed a bit high and outside. But he happily pronounced it a strike—and, for the most part, we writers let him get away with it.

However, he didn't get away with the hubris of trying to single-handedly settle the baseball strike that deprived America of the 1994 World Series. It was apparent that Clinton understood neither the intractability of the labor issues involved nor the culture of modern baseball. His aides took note of the fact that one of the players' representatives, the pitcher Tom Glavine, of the Atlanta Braves, failed to wear a necktie for a meeting with the President. What they should have focused on was the heat of Glavine's emotions: he hinted that any player who crossed the picket line would have trouble once the strike ended, and referred to Phil Niekro, a former teammate, as "greedy" and "a scab" for even considering pitching during the strike. With another strike looming next year, the sportscaster Bob Costas asked President Bush if he would try to intercede. The baseball-savvy Bush said no.

Jimmy Carter had even bigger problems than Clinton with the sport. "It was almost as if he was coached in baseball ineptitude," Mead and Dickson wrote. During his campaign Carter regularly inflicted on the public the sight of himself in shorts pitching slow-pitch softball. But after his election he couldn't be bothered to throw out the first ball on opening day (or at any other time), thus becoming the first President in nearly seventy years to eschew the tradition. As President, Carter didn't even attend a major-league game until three years into his term. In hindsight this is hardly surprising: Carter was also the President who thought he could ignore Congress. His inadequacies at baseball not only foreshadowed his insufficiencies as President but also help to explain them.

True to form, however, Carter has

made an excellent *ex-First Fan*. As his hometown team, the Atlanta Braves, became a power in the 1990s, Carter was a fixture at their home games, and was caught on camera enthusiastically doing the "tomahawk chop," the extremely politically incorrect gesture of Braves fans. In the seventh game of the 1992 National League playoffs, after Francisco Cabrera, pinch-hitting, smacked an improbable ninth-inning two-out base hit to put the Braves in the World Series, Carter was in the throng that joyously rushed onto the field.

For some Presidents, a connection to baseball serves as an index of overall approachability. Troops under George Washington's command at Valley Forge played an early version of the game, and Washington himself liked to play catch with his aides-de-camp. But he never joined his troops in play: as a general and later as President, he believed that he needed to maintain a certain distance between himself and the people he led.

In contrast, William Howard Taft was known for his genial, outgoing nature (Teddy Roosevelt once remarked, "One loves him at first sight"), and this was nowhere truer than in the stands. On April 19, 1909, when Taft plopped his big, teddy-bear-like frame down in National Park for his first Washington Senators game as President, the game was interrupted by the crowd's applause.

In some cases a President's relationship to the game has proved a fair barometer of his ability to lead. Franklin Roosevelt kept baseball going during World War II, even though many of the players had gone into the service, arguing that doing so was in the national interest. As he pointed out in a letter to Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, "There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before ... that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before." Compare his public-spirited actions with the private eccentricity of Richard Nixon, who, shortly after the Watergate break-in that would envelop his Ad-

ministration, holed up at Camp David writing down his all-time all-star teams. Naturally, Nixon evaded the toughest decisions, putting together teams for different leagues and eras rather than coming up with a single list of best players—thus avoiding, for example, having to choose from among Willie Mays, Joe DiMaggio, and Mickey Mantle for center field.

Ronald Reagan may have owed his reputation as The Great Communicator to baseball: one of his first communicating jobs was as a long-distance announcer, re-creating Chicago Cubs games on the radio in Iowa. Later, during his Hollywood days, Reagan played a Hall of Famer in the 1952 film *The Winning Team*, a sanitized biography of the Phillies, Cubs, and Cardinals pitching great Grover Cleveland Alexander. Bob Lemon, a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians and a future Hall of Famer himself, served as Reagan's stand-in during scenes requiring play. At one point the script called for Alexander to hit a catcher's mitt nailed to the side of a barn. "Piece of cake," Lemon said. Maybe it was the cameras, but Lemon proceeded to hit everything except the mitt.

"Mind if I try it?" Reagan asked in an affable voice.

"One pitch, smack in the middle of that mitt," Lemon later told a reporter. "I've never been so embarrassed in all my life."

Although our current President may have unprecedented claims to the sport, Eisenhower is almost certainly the best ballplayer ever to occupy the Oval Office: while at West Point he played professional ball one summer in the Kansas minor leagues, under an assumed name. And baseball's hold on Eisenhower, as on Bush, never waned.

"When I was a small boy in Kansas," Eisenhower once recalled, "a friend of mine and I went fishing, and as we sat there in the warmth of a summer afternoon on a river bank, we talked about what we wanted to do when we grew up. I told him that I wanted to be a real major league baseball player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he'd like to be president of the United States. Neither of us got our wish." —CARL M. CANNON



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RUSSIA IS FINISHED

*The unstoppable descent of a
once great power into social catastrophe
and strategic irrelevance*

BY JEFFREY TAYLER

.....



During the Cold War years I perceived Russia through a Cold War prism—as a land of vast, frozen twilight realms of steppe and forest where a drama was being acted out that involved players of satanic evil or saintly good and doctrines that promised either mankind’s salvation or its ruin. I developed a passion for the country, a passion that derived in part from a weighty postulate: that what happened there concerned not only Russians but the rest of the world. In its Soviet incarnation Russia had nuclear weapons and a powerful military, a threatening and subversive ideology, a tendency to invade its neighbors or meddle in their affairs, and the might to wreak havoc on other continents. Russians I came to know spoke of the future of their country as if it would be the fate of humanity, and I agreed with them.

Intrigued by this drama, I set out in 1993, after the Cold War had ended, to cross Russia, journeying more than 8,000 miles from Magadan, a former gulag settlement on the Sea of Okhotsk, to Europe. I wrote a book about the trip. I made Moscow my home. I married a Russian. My life—as much as it can be, given that I carry an American passport—is Russian. But having devoted half my life to this country, and having lived through most of its “transition,” I have arrived at a conclusion at odds with what I thought before: Internal contradictions in Russia’s thousand-year history have destined it to shrink demographically, weaken economically, and, possibly, disintegrate territorially. The drama is coming to a close, and within a few decades Russia will concern the rest of the world no more than any

Third World country with abundant resources, an impoverished people, and a corrupt government. In short, as a Great Power, Russia is finished.

Why this should be so will become apparent during a look back at the past decade and how its events stemmed from Russia’s Eastern Orthodox civilization and a decimating, isolating, long-ago invasion whose consequences determine the relation between citizen and state to this day.

OCTOBER, 1993

Despite the grave images the media show us, the full extent of Russia’s weakness is not apparent to most visitors at first. Trains run on time. Stores open on schedule. The obvious poverty of shantytowns and slums is rare. Though rising sharply, street crime is still less common than in major cities of the West. At times gruff in public, Russians privately maintain a superb civility and dignity, and their oriental tradition of hospitality toward strangers puts Westerners to shame. Customs now regarded as quaint (or sexist) in the West—such as a man’s opening doors for a woman and paying for his date’s meals—are the rule, and only the indigent dress shabbily. Standards of education, especially in math and science, exceed those of all but a few Western countries; the average Russian high schooler may have a grasp of U.S. or European history that would humiliate an American college student. The remnants of the Soviet welfare state ensure that few starve; the apartments the Soviet government gave to its citizens make

Russia a country of homeowners to a great extent. During the spring and summer months Russians take to the streets to enjoy the clement weather; in the endless, magenta-hued dusks of May and June the well-lit central avenues of Moscow and St. Petersburg resemble fashion runways, with poised, long-legged beauties strolling arm in arm with their dates. On street corners, or in pedestrian underpasses during the winter months, buskers play the balalaika, sing "Kalinka," and chant Eastern Orthodox hymns. In sum, few visitors find cause for despair, and Armageddon appears well at bay. Reform and prosperity, it would seem, are a hair's breadth away, and those who would deny this are shortsighted pessimists.

I, too, thought this way when I arrived in Moscow. In 1993 I was an optimist. How could one not be, after six years of perestroika, the defeat of the Communist coup-plotters in 1991, and the innumerable positive assessments by prominent Westerners, from Presidents to journalists to economists and investors? The image of Boris Yeltsin mounting a tank in front of the Supreme Soviet during the attempted coup and announcing, in his kingly baritone, that Russia would remain free of tyranny retained perfect clarity in my mind's eye. Moreover, in 1993 Yeltsin had just pre-

goodness of men. I answered that this would all change, and we argued. But it was a beautiful day, the poplars stood red and gold in the fresh autumn air, and we soon dropped the subject. Suddenly we realized that we were almost alone on the streets, although it was a weekend afternoon. Only the distant sound of sirens broke the silence.

That evening I arrived home and turned on the television to scenes of mayhem and carnage in central Moscow. A couple of weeks earlier Yeltsin had ordered the Supreme Soviet, which opposed him, to disband. The deputies had refused; they had proclaimed a new government and appointed their own President. They had locked themselves inside the Soviet; soldiers and demonstrators had surrounded it; and a stand-off had ensued. While Lena and I were out strolling, some of the demonstrators had broken through the line of soldiers and set off on a rampage through town, shooting their way to the main television station, which they attempted without success to take by force. The next morning Yeltsin ordered tanks into the streets, and I watched from the bank of the Moscow River as they blasted the white-marble citadel of the Supreme Soviet into a flaming, blackened shell, as snipers fired on passersby from rooftops, as crowds ran screaming along the embankment.

RUSSIA WILL SOON CONCERN US NO MORE THAN ANY THIRD WORLD COUNTRY. INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS IN RUSSIA'S THOUSAND-YEAR HISTORY HAVE DESTINED IT TO SHRINK DEMOGRAPHICALLY, WEAKEN ECONOMICALLY, AND, POSSIBLY, DISINTEGRATE TERRITORIALY.

vailed in a national referendum that granted him a mandate to continue his free-market and democratization reforms. History in Russia was beginning anew. What needed to be changed would be changed; problems that needed solving were going to be solved.

One warm afternoon in early October of 1993 I was strolling through the Kitai-Gorod neighborhood of central Moscow with a young woman by the name of Lena. An accountant, Lena had cropped flaxen hair and hazel eyes that radiated purpose; she was well spoken and curious. We talked about Pushkin's poetry, about the Michael Jackson concert that had just taken place in Moscow, about which designers were chic in the West, about how she liked to spend her days off at her parents' dacha. But when our conversation turned to Russia, a hardness invaded her eyes. I took the position that Yeltsin would keep the country on the reformist path; she countered with declarations that "nothing good will ever come of Russia," that the truth about what was going on here would never be known, that one who thought otherwise was naive, and that Russians were, above all, an unpredictable people, given to wild swings and dangerous extremes, lacking the patience and adherence to principle that democracy demanded. She scoffed at forecasts of prosperity and laughed at Westerners, with their belief in progress, the rule of law, and the

The deputies surrendered that evening, but for the next two weeks the Kremlin imposed a curfew. From the moment the nightly curfew began, cries to halt, bursts of gunfire, and screams would echo outside my apartment and last until dawn. My neighbors and I assumed that the shooting and screaming had something to do with Ministry of Internal Affairs troops apprehending curfew violators or hunting down the Chechen guerrillas whom, it was said, the Chechen speaker of the Supreme Soviet had installed in Moscow, but we never learned exactly what was going on. There were rumors and more rumors; the media were biased in Yeltsin's favor and could not be fully trusted. During the day troops rounded up Chechen and Azerbaijani street traders, often beating them, seizing their goods and money, and bulldozing their kiosks before expelling them from Moscow. This they did with the approval of the mobs that gathered to watch: many saw the dark-skinned Caucasians as outsiders who stirred up trouble, or as *mafiozy*.

Reformer or no, Yeltsin had the guns, and he used them. As under the czars and Stalin, so under Yeltsin—might would prevail in Russia, dialogue would be drowned out in the rattle of gunfire and blasts of artillery, violence would be used by the state against those who opposed reforms that were at least ostensibly for the good of the country. But there was something new this time: the violence received

accolades from Western politicians whom most Russians had until then viewed as honorable and above the tumult of Russian politics. Because the West supported the bombardment and sided so openly with Yeltsin afterward, many saw the West as colluding with Yeltsin to weaken Russia. From then on Russians began deriding Yeltsin as the *stavlennik* ("protégé") or *marionetka* ("puppet") of the West. Russians' view of their country, as Lena had expressed it to me, was imbued with pessimism (which turned out to be justified), fatalism, and an awareness of irreconcilable traits and historical contradictions. If reform depended on democracy, and democracy required dialogue and trust, what did it mean that when faced with one of his first major crises, Yeltsin started shooting at his adversaries? In short, what had really changed?

THE RULE OF LAWLESSNESS

The leaders of the October, 1993, uprising were charged with inciting mass disorder, imprisoned, given amnesty in early 1994, and released, sufficiently chastised that most have not since participated in national politics. With his survival at stake, Yeltsin proposed a constitution that would grant him czarlike powers. A referendum was held, and the constitution passed into law. Liberal Russians (and I) viewed the constitution with some alarm. Did Russia really need a new czar? Wasn't an overly powerful executive branch of government what had always plagued Russia? But then, Yeltsin had staked his career on defeating the Communists, who appeared to pose the greatest threat to reform, so we gave him the benefit of the doubt.

In 1994, in order to stay in Moscow, I took a job as the co-manager of a Russian-American company that provided physical-protection services to Western businesses opening up in Russia. (My partner was Russian, a former deputy chief of the Moscow militia.) If in politics some sort of order had been restored, in other areas of national life, specifically business and the economy, a war was being waged—a war that, more than the uprising of 1993, would poison Russia and pervert its course, and of which I would acquire personal, nerve-shattering knowledge.

One September evening in 1994 I was driving home from work across central Moscow. The sky was a soup of gray drizzle and black cloud. Traffic was light; cars drifted past me or I passed them in a swooshing slush of rain and flying mud. I turned off the Garden Ring Road onto Vtoraya Tverskaya-Yamskaya Street and pulled up to a traffic light. It was red. I waited.

About halfway up the next block a man entered a Mercedes parked at the curb. A few seconds later an explosion tore the car apart and blew out the windows in the surrounding buildings, and the shock wave hurled pedestrians to the ground. A column of flame erupted from the vehicle; glass and scraps of metal tinkled and clanked as they fell to the ground. I jumped out of my car to look,

and then a second, lesser explosion—the Mercedes's gas tank—scattered shreds of metal within a twenty-yard radius.

A couple of minutes later a militia car arrived, but the officers did little more than gawk at the burning vehicle. By the time a fire engine had pulled up, black smoke overhung the street, and the flames shooting from the wreckage reached into the branches of a tree above. The firemen brought out a hose and managed to extinguish the blaze with a torrent of white foam, which spread over the street like dirty snow. Steam resembling winter fog arose from the burnt car. The blaze out, the firemen threw aside their hose and pried open the door with a crowbar. The inside of the vehicle was a skeleton of charred, twisted metal. A few chunks of singed flesh were all that remained of the man inside.

The radio first reported this as the murder of a prominent actor; then reports said a banker. It turned out to be the contract killing of a *mafija* boss whose alias was Sylvester.

A great gangland war was on in Russia, and I again heard gunfire in the night around my apartment. Bankers, businessmen, and innocent bystanders were being murdered in shootouts, contract hits, and car and apartment bombings—sometimes at the rate of several a day in Moscow alone. Competing territorial criminal gangs, many of which operate under the protection of police and state officials, were establishing their turf, taking over businesses across Russia, eliminating those who resisted. Government security services, so powerful under the Soviets, now found themselves outgunned; they were also vulnerable to corruption, because most officers and soldiers earned less than \$150 a month.

There was nothing subtle, hidden, or surreptitious about the *mafija*. *Mafiozy* often drove armored Mercedes and BMWs equipped with sirens and flashing lights and used them to force other cars to the side of the road; to avoid traffic jams they turned onto the sidewalk, honked, and shot ahead, sending pedestrians diving out of the way. They gathered at nightclubs where the cover charges alone could exceed \$400; they ordered cognac at \$200 a shot and hookers at \$1,000 a session; they dressed in Versace and Hugo Boss suits; they maintained diamond-clad concubines of mesmerizing, icy beauty. Outside Moscow they built grand dachas for themselves, their wives, and their mistresses; they vacationed on the Riviera and in the Swiss Alps. In a land where honesty was a fault and the good were always the losers, always the poor, *mafiozy* became role models for many of the young, who in at least one survey named "contract killer" and "hard-currency prostitute" as the professions to which they most aspired. Money (and guns) made kings—understandably, in view of both Russia's poverty and the revulsion the young felt for the Soviet dogma of self-abnegation for the sake of a bright future, which never came. A free and fair market was an abstract concept; driving a \$200,000 armored Mercedes 600 that could survive a bomb explosion under its chassis was fun.

The *mafiozy* were richer, cleverer, more lavish, and more aggressive than the expatriate businessmen arriving in Moscow, lured by Western journalists' portrayal of Russia as the "Wild East"—a tantalizing but deceptive catchphrase that implied frontierlike opportunity for all in a munificent wilderness. When the expatriates discovered that the odds had been stacked against them, they came to our security firm for protection; they were frightened, insomniac, at times trembling, and always stunned. Where was the reforming Russia that would let them get rich while preaching the gospel of the free market to reverent native subordinates?

The Byzantine nature of Russia's legal environment provides organized crime with an entrée into businesses by making violations of the law—matters for blackmail—inevitable, and by leaving entrepreneurs at the mercy of corrupt bureaucrats and state agencies. It is impossible to operate a business successfully in Russia and also observe all the laws, because there are too many contradictory laws. The approximately twenty different levies on the books would tax a company as much as 105 percent if they were paid; businesses must evade taxes to at least some extent or go bankrupt. Most enterprises maintain a secret *chornaya kassa* (a "black accounting book" that accurately shows profits and losses) but submit to auditors from the Tax Inspectorate the *belaya bukhgalteriya* ("white accounts"—false records of low profits and high expenses). The auditors themselves are barely getting by: they work for a commission (a percentage of the taxes they collect), and may be receptive to bribes, gifts, rented women, and so on.

State agencies other than the Tax Inspectorate suffocate businesses and add to the mess. Registration, re-registration, and certification with municipal departments cost enterprises hundreds of employee hours. Bureaucrats may expedite paperwork for bribes. Unbribed, they may "forget" or "misplace" one's papers, deny requests, delay decisions, fail to show up for meetings, or send one back to a lower-level bureaucrat for this or that document or stamp or signature. Fire, sanitary, and labor inspectors make frequent and unexpected calls on businesses. If something is not in order, or the inspectors are not adequately bribed or fêted, they may order the company closed, seize assets, or arrange for arrests. Legal redress most often fails: the government rarely loses in court against the accused, and judges are known to be on the take.

Enter the *mafija*. It has been estimated that 80 percent of Russian businesses pay *dan'* ("tribute," or protection money) to a *krysha* ("roof," or racket), but the real number is probably higher; one may assume that any business operating openly has a *krysha*. (Entrepreneurs providing clandestine services are less likely to run into trouble.) *Mafiozy* approach businesses directly, visiting in groups of three or four; one of them speaks in a friendly manner, warning directors that they must pay *dan'*—15 to 20 percent of their company's gross earnings—or suffer violence at the hands of unnamed

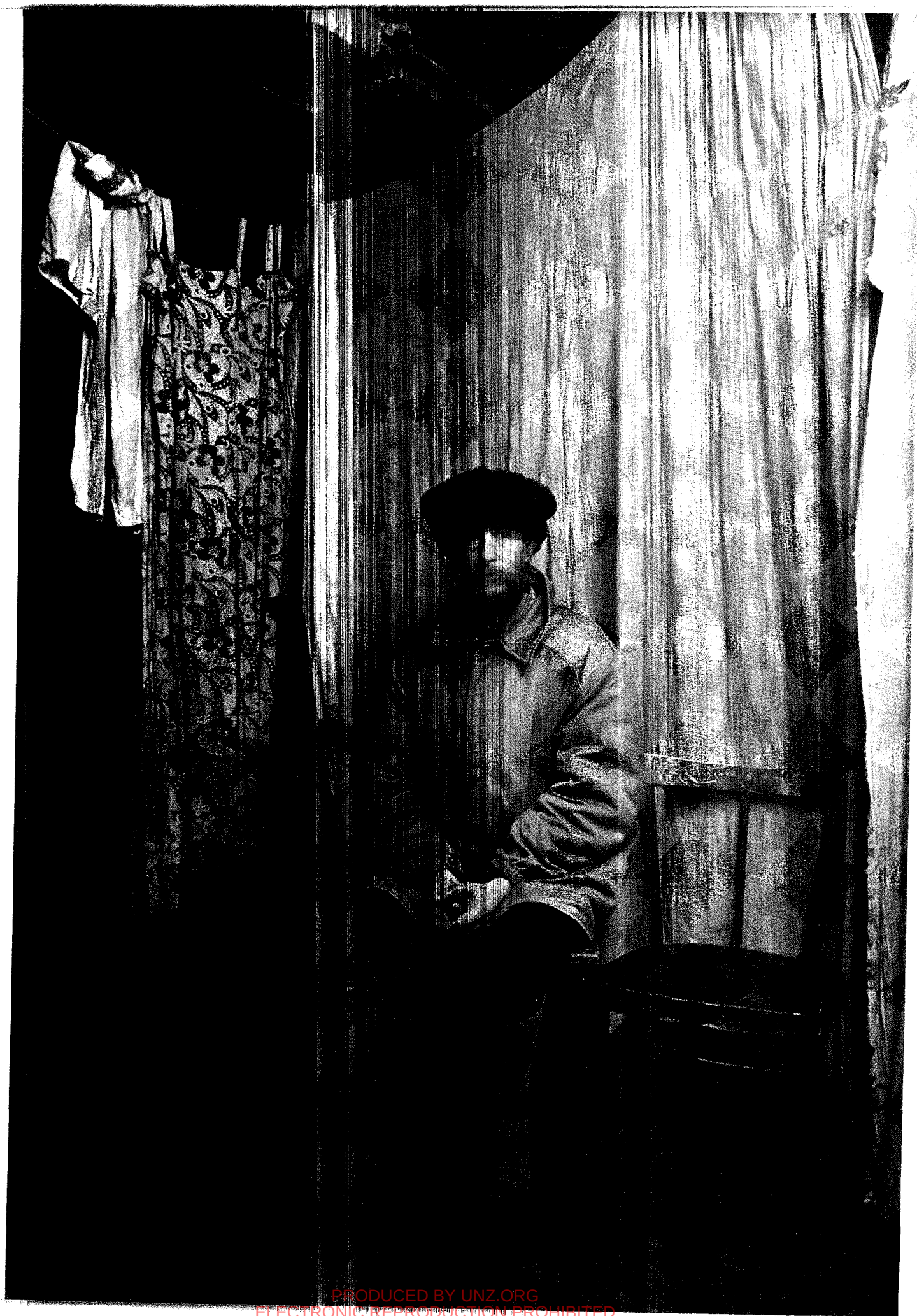
gangs. If the *mafiozy* operate under the guise of a security agency, they may insist that the director sign a contract—a ruse that has deceived some businesses into relinquishing control of their bank accounts. Once a business has acquired a *krysha*, it must resist the advances of rival gangs or risk falling prey to *razborki*—a settling of scores over territory. If businesses refuse to pay, which is rare now, the thugs mount an escalating campaign of pressure, starting with verbal threats, moving on to beating and kidnapping, and ending with well-placed bullets or the torture of loved ones or a bomb placed by the door of the businessman's apartment.

If businessmen attempt to conceal revenues from the *krysha* victimizing them, they may be exposed by moles the *mafija* has placed within their companies. Often, in return for payment, accountants or secretaries provide the mob with information about their employers' violations of tax laws. In any case, a businessman may simply be unable to cope with the mobsters' demands, which can increase at any time: in addition to regular *dan'*, thugs may demand "gifts" in the form of SUVs, rented women, or bags of cash. However, the *mafija* can play a useful role in business development: if competitors with lower prices or better goods appear on the scene, fires, theft, murder, and other bedlam can be arranged.

In most countries organized crime affects principally illegal trade (narcotics, prostitution, gambling), but in Russia the mob can take over any business—not only because most businesses have to break the law to stay afloat, and thus leave themselves vulnerable to extortion, but also because so much economic activity takes place in untraceable cash. Although Russian law requires that a business open a bank account, Russian banks are notoriously unreliable—failing frequently, closing unexpectedly, disappearing with their depositors' money, or charging high fees for irregular services. A business may thus be forced to conduct most of its transactions in cash. Other Russian financial institutions have proved no more reliable: investment houses have turned out to be pyramid schemes, and millions of private investors have lost their life savings when the schemes collapsed.

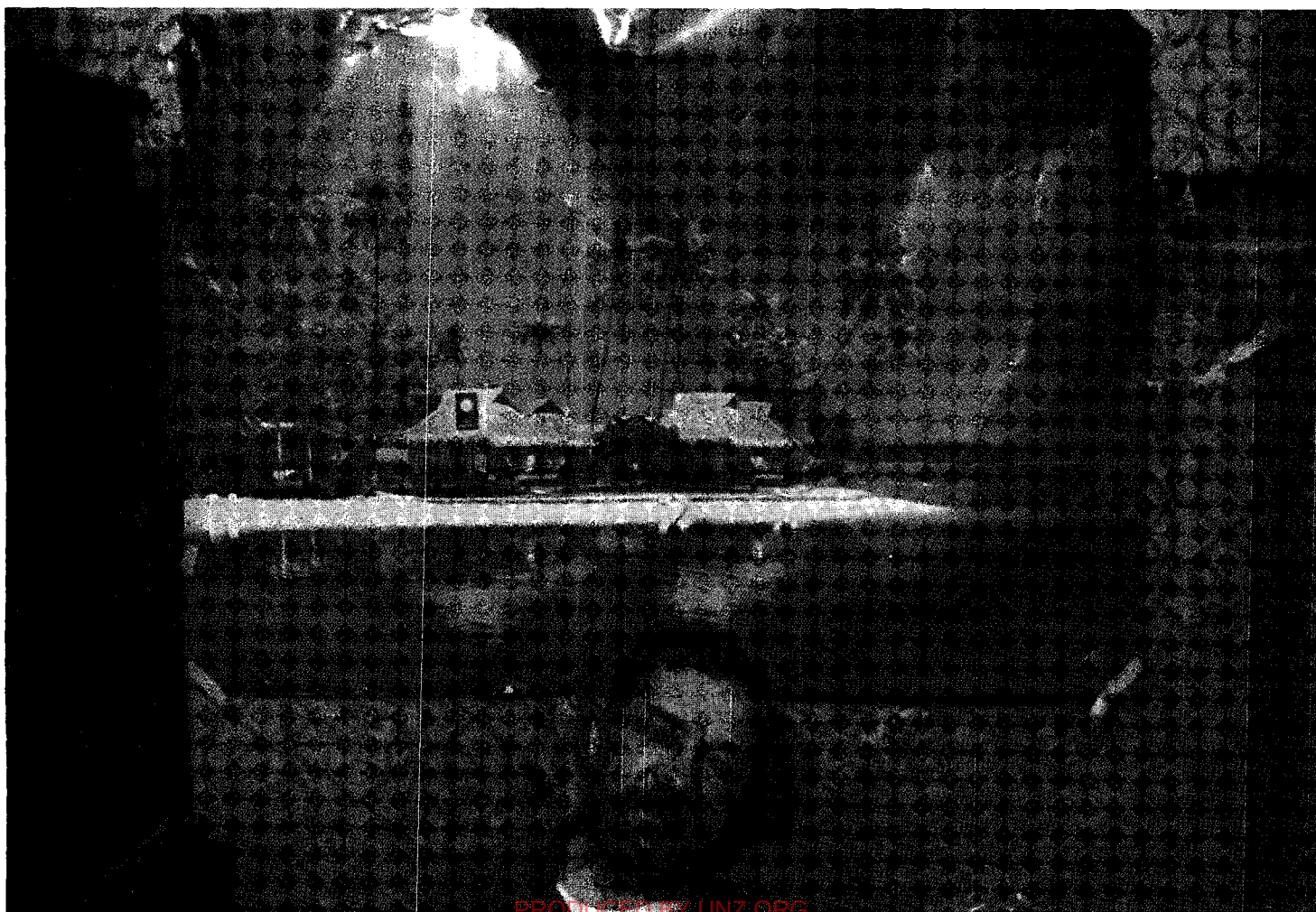
A country with a \$340 billion economy and no reliable banking system or financial sector makes a poor investment, to say the least, and capital flight has become a necessity for many businesses. It is estimated that for most of the nine years since the fall of the Soviet Union some \$2 billion a month has fled the country for banks in the Caribbean, Switzerland, and elsewhere. Aid from international lending agencies totaled \$66 billion through 1998; in the mid-1990s roughly \$10 billion a year in aid poured into Russia while at least double that flowed out.

Opposite: Vladimir Evgrafovitch Kouznetsov, forty years old and unemployed, Terekhino, 1998





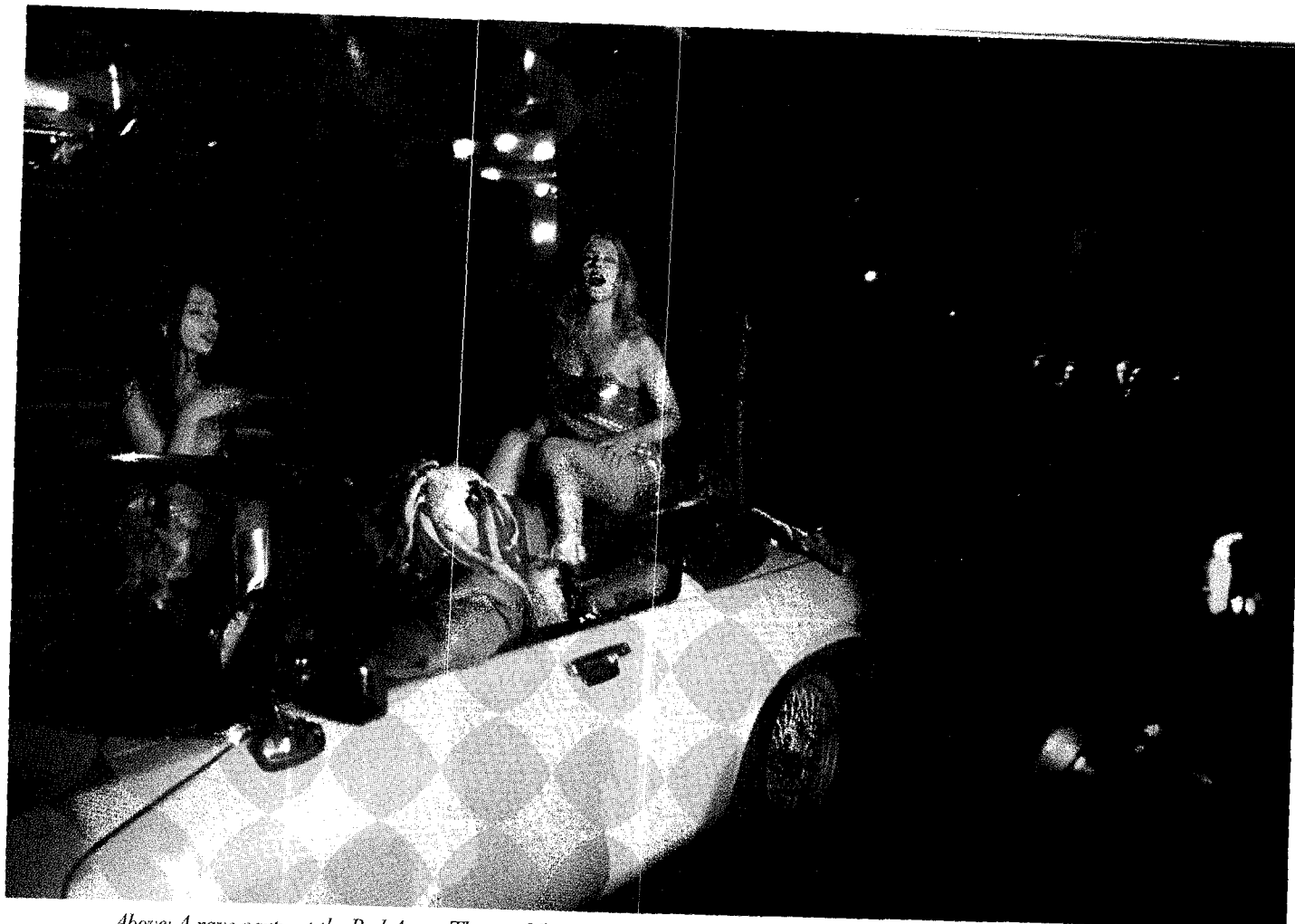
Above: Businessmen and Miss Moscow contestants at the Up and Down disco, Moscow, 1996. Below: Perm, 1998





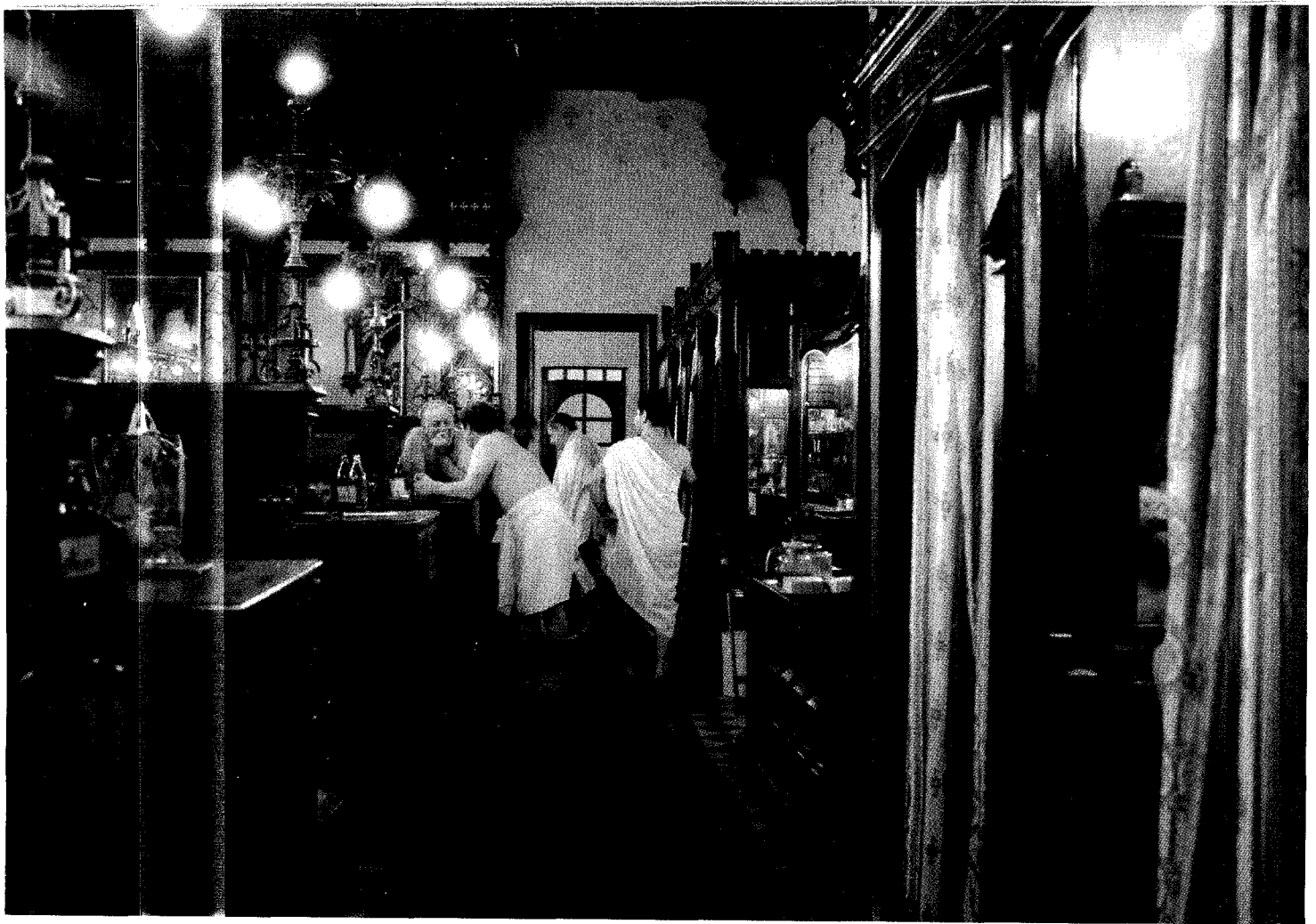
Above: Moscow's Yeliseevsky department store, 1997. Below: Boys in Yaroslavl, 175 miles from Moscow





Above: A rave party at the Red Army Theater, Moscow, 1995. Below: A victim of a Russian mortar shell, Grozny, Chechnya, 1995





Above: Moscow's Sverdlovsky bathhouse, a favorite of the well connected, 1996. Below: Olia and Micha Doubrovski, Kholmogory, 1998



Faced with such danger, disarray, corruption, and deceit (most of which is well publicized by the Russian media: news shows frequently amount to chronicles of bribery, death, and dismemberment), Russians have stopped feeling outrage and have resigned themselves. The murder of an entrepreneur “as a result of his business activity” (to quote a phrase beloved by militia press centers) arouses no surprise, only a shrug. The excesses of mobsters on a Moscow street provoke no indignation, only envy. It is accepted that the chaos and contradictory laws benefit those in power—that the state has abandoned its people to the thugs because it is in league with them. In any case, those in power, be they *mafiozy* or the government, have the guns; thoughts of overt resistance are rare.

OLIGARCHS AT THE TROUGH

Small businesses account for less than a tenth of Russia's economy. Most economic activity—and theft—is conducted by those who have become known as the oligarchs. Until the collapse of the Russian economy, in August of 1998, the oligarchs, who number around fifteen, garnered praise from many Western journalists and aid officials as the glamorous magnates of the New Russia, daring pioneers out to establish a free market that would ensure the political demise of the Communists. Just as Russia was dubbed the Wild East, the oligarchs were christened the country's Robber Barons. But the appellation is misleading: the oligarchs rose to prominence not by building railroads and industries but by exploiting antiquated pricing systems, disorganized legal codes, and—most important—Soviet-era connections with the government. In the early 1990s, in accordance with the economic “shock therapy” advocated by the West, the state relinquished control over the ruble and freed prices (which had been held artificially low) on consumer goods, but maintained more or less fixed prices on oil, gas, timber, precious metals, and other natural resources. The ruble plunged against the dollar, and within days the life savings of millions were wiped out. Absurdities resulted: for example, the one dollar for which a pack of Marlboros sold in Moscow would buy three tons of crude oil or a trainload of prime Siberian timber; one could buy a plane ticket and fly halfway across the country for the cost of a pound of potatoes.

Those—including Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Potanin, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky—with ties to the ministries that control natural resources took advantage of price irregularities to make export deals at astronomical profits. Thus it was their connections, rather than entrepreneurial initiative, that made these men wealthy; they used their wealth to buy influence in the media and the government. Wealth begat wealth and influence spawned influence. The oligarchs also established banks and arranged to have them designated conduits of state money, much of which—including hundreds of millions of dollars that Moscow later allocated for the rebuilding of Chechnya after the first Chechen war—

simply disappeared. Some oligarchs won tax exemptions from the government (spelled out in presidential decrees) which allowed them to import alcohol, cigarettes, and luxury cars duty-free. Tax exemption was eventually extended to others with ostensibly noble motives: by the mid-1990s the Russian Orthodox Church and the National Sports Fund were importing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of alcohol and cigarettes a year. This aroused little public anger: people accepted as a given that those in power would use their positions for aggrandizement.

While the oligarchs were amassing their wealth, most press attention, both in Russia and abroad, was on the state privatization scheme conceived and implemented by Anatoly Chubais, the State Property Committee Chairman, and blessed by Western governments. In 1992 and 1993 the government doled out vouchers (*vauchery*) that Russians could use to invest in state enterprises that were to be put on public auction blocks. Although 41 million Russians acquired shares in 17,000 enterprises, the scheme amounted to a sham—little more than a way for the government to divest itself of moribund enterprises that the Soviet Union had gone bankrupt supporting. The state's most profitable assets—the oil and precious-metals industries—did not come under the purview of the initial scheme. Russians quickly understood that they had been deceived, and *vauchery* came to mean worthless chits of paper; *privatizatsiya* was popularly punned into *prikhvatizatsiya* (from the verb *prikhvatit*—“to seize or grab”).

Although Russia's largest and most valuable company, the natural-gas enterprise Gazprom (its exact worth is unknown, but estimates have reached as high as \$950 billion), was divided secretly among the state, management, and unknown investors in the early 1990s, the rest of Russia's energy and precious-metals industries hit the auction block in late 1995. The auctions, organized by Anatoly Chubais and hailed as “competitive,” were rigged by those oligarch-owned banks and companies to which Chubais entrusted them. Large stakes in oil, nickel, and telecommunications companies were sold at a fraction of their real value to the oligarchs and their affiliates; significantly higher bids were disqualified on technicalities. As a result the oligarchs found themselves in control of Russia's most profitable strategic resource: oil. After Saudi Arabia, Russia contains the largest oil reserves on earth; it is the third largest oil producer in the world.

Having acquired these companies for next to nothing, the oligarchs set about looting them, stripping them of assets for the quickest possible gain and shipping the profits abroad. Through an elaborate scheme known as transfer, or corporate pricing, by which a Russia-based subsidiary of an oil company sells oil to the parent company or to another subsidiary abroad at an artificially low price (so that the latter can resell a large portion of the oil at Western-market prices), the oligarchs have since cheated the state out of

billions of dollars of tax revenues a year (roughly \$9 billion last year alone). They have also transferred shares to offshore holding companies, arranged for the theft of equipment, and embezzled funds. Russian judges, law-enforcement agents, and state officials who objected to the looting were intimidated into acquiescence or bought off.

The oil industry, plagued by obsolete and decrepit equipment and deprived of needed investment, has over the past ten years cut production by 50 percent. To protect their "investments" the oligarchs have been the staunchest advocates of the status quo: in 1996 they financed Yeltsin's re-election to the presidency, giving the ailing, boozing leader campaign funds (thirty times more than election law permitted) and media coverage that took him from single-digit approval ratings to victory over the Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov.

As bad as all that sounds, throughout the 1990s in Moscow the standard of living rose. (Moscow is where most of the oligarchs live; where the banks, restaurants, shops, medical centers, and travel and service industries that cater to them are located; and where the greatest share—perhaps 80 percent—of Russia's capital is parked.) The city underwent a glitzy transformation, in part owing to preparations

and the government complied. Yeltsin's administration floated the idea of setting up a CheKa (an acronym that stands for "emergency committee," harking back to Lenin's bloodthirsty secret-police organ of the same name) to oversee tax collection; it formed tax-police SWAT teams that began raiding entrepreneurs, often acting on tips from informers. In cities across the country giant posters appeared carrying citations from the constitution set against the Russian tricolor, adjuring citizens to pay taxes or else. For those unmoved by the call to patriotism or by fear of the tax police, other posters showed teary-eyed grandmothers pleading with arms outstretched for citizens to pay taxes so that the old women could receive their pensions.

It didn't work. Most businessmen were (quietly) outraged. They knew that the payment of taxes by oligarchs and those close to the state was a matter of negotiation, and that many tax exemptions, though declared annulled in 1995 at the request of the IMF, still functioned. Indeed, the state *paid compensation* to certain companies for income lost in the abolition of exemptions. If they were not operating secretly out of unmarked offices, or changing locations and names to evade taxes, private enterprises (and even government agencies, including the Tax Ministry itself) made

THE COUNTRYWIDE DECAY CONTINUES UNDER PUTIN, WITH TV TOWERS CATCHING FIRE, NUCLEAR SUBMARINES SINKING, APARTMENT BUILDINGS EXPLODING FROM LEAKS IN DECREPIT GAS PIPES, WHOLE REGIONS GOING WITHOUT HEAT AND ELECTRICITY IN WINTER.

for its 850th anniversary—an occasion that might have gone uncelebrated if the mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, had not been pursuing presidential ambitions. Muscovites working for finance, oil, and investment companies and earning \$5,000 to \$20,000 or more a month constituted the upper class. Many of my well-off friends were spending their entire salaries on clothes, new apartments, restaurant meals, and travel abroad. (Profligate spending made sense, because there was no safe place to save money.) Designer boutiques opened across the city; the already high numbers of Mercedes, BMWs, and SUVs on the streets increased further. As the rest of the country slipped into medieval poverty, Moscow was becoming, at least by superficial measures, a world-class capital.

But the country was nearing collapse. The government and state enterprises were failing to pay salaries to millions of Russians in the hinterland, often for months on end—while the directors of those enterprises received hundreds of millions of dollars in state support, which they presumably funneled to accounts abroad. International banks and Western economists ignored evidence of corruption and identified Russia's main problem as insufficient tax collection. They made loans (totaling roughly \$10 billion) contingent on improved levies. They urged the Russian government to do all it could to increase its take,

use of loopholes in the law which allowed certain kinds of expenses—for insurance, meals, and so on—to go untaxed, while only income that fell under the rubric "salary" was taxed. The result, to this day, is that companies pay perhaps a tenth of their employees' compensation as taxable salary and nine tenths under various other categories, often in *chornyj nal* ("black cash"). This proves profitable for employees and employers both. Only the state loses. But then, no one gives a damn about the state. Why?

"Those government thieves aren't getting any of *my* money!" summarizes the feelings of Russians toward taxes and their state. When Russians talk of their politicians, they frequently speak of "thieves," "bandits," and "swindlers"—and not hyperbolically: the presence of criminals in the Duma is a well-publicized fact. (To acquire immunity from prosecution, some of Russia's most notorious scofflaws have gotten themselves elected to seats in the legislature.) Russians refer to the state itself as the *kormushka*, or "trough." The notion that a politician could be serving his constituents while dipping his *morda* ("snout") in the *kormushka* (whether stealing state funds or IMF dollars), or that laws written by "bandits" and "swindlers" could be just or justly applied, or that pigs at the trough and people coerced into parting with their earnings to fill that trough have anything in common, is laughable.

THE DEATH OF "THE COMMON GOOD"

The hostility that Russians feel toward their government comes not from some innate lack of civic duty but from the terror, violence, and deceit that have since the late Middle Ages characterized the way in which their rulers have treated them. This repression has roots in a history very different from that of the West—a history that gave birth to the civilization of Russian Orthodox Christianity. In 988 the principalities of Kievan Rus' (the predecessor of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) accepted Christianity from the Byzantine Greeks, rather than from the Romans—a matter of no small import, given that Byzantium was moribund, its religion having suffocated the intellectual traditions of the Hellenes. When the Eastern and Western Churches excommunicated each other and Christendom divided, in the Great Schism of 1054, the Kievan Russians found themselves religiously estranged from and in political opposition to Western Europe. To this day Russians refer to themselves as "Christians" or "Orthodox" (*Pravoslavnye*: "those who glorify God in the proper manner") but call people of Western Christian denominations "Catholics"—a term implying heresy and harking back to the schism.

The estrangement from Western Europe alone might have been crippling for Russia's development (assuming that interaction with the West would have exerted a positive influence), but two centuries after the schism an event that was permanently to poison citizen-state relations befell the country: the invasion of Mongol hordes. Sweeping into Kievan Rus' on small, swift horses, firing arrows of bone that pierced Russian armor, the hordes pillaged, massacred, and enslaved the Slavic population to such an extent that most Kievan principalities were knocked out of the history books for 200 years. No comparable calamity befell the West. Mongol rule had the effect of further isolating Russia; interaction with the West was limited. Mongol khans, with all their pomp and cruelty, became the figures on which many Russian rulers would model themselves.

The Kievan Russians believed that God had sent the hordes as punishment for their impiety—a belief endorsed by the Orthodox Church, which prospered under Mongol protection. But the princes colluded with their Mongol overlords, extorting *dan*' from their subjects for their masters, and saw the fractiousness that had prevailed among their principalities as having invited invasion.

Eventually Moscow subjugated other Russian principalities and grew strong enough to throw off the Mongol yoke. Muscovite czars, Ivan the Terrible foremost among them, destroyed all institutions that could rival their power, turning the nobility into servants, enslaving the peasants to the nobility, and employing Orthodoxy as their official ideology—for Orthodoxy proclaimed the czar God's chosen representative on earth. The czars exploited the people to strengthen the state. The Muscovite court adopted administrative and military practices similar to those of the former

Mongol masters, with symbolism borrowed from the Byzantine Greeks. The concept of an omnipotent state as a divine bulwark against external heathen threats became paramount, and was embodied in the absolutism endorsed by the Orthodox Church.

When Constantinople fell to the Turks, in 1453, Moscow became, in Russian eyes, the Third Rome (the first was the Rome of the Latins, which had fallen to the barbarians and was now in the hands of Catholic "heretics"; the second was the Rome of the Greeks, the Byzantine Empire), the sole standard-bearer for the true faith. Thus, while Europe enjoyed the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, Russia, isolated and infused with a messianic sense of its own superiority over the West, suffered the predations of rulers bent on building a strong state. It also expanded in every direction, subsuming territories populated by non-Slavic ethnic groups, transforming itself from Muscovy into the Russian Empire. The absolute ruler would permit the development of no civil society that could mount any opposition. Until the last days of czarism the choice before the Russian people was either forehead-banging submission to authority or scythe-swinging revolt. Opposing the czar was tantamount to defying God; faith and political allegiance were one.

Against this historical backdrop the Bolsheviks came to power, in 1917. Taking full advantage of Russia's absolutist traditions, Joseph Stalin followed in the footsteps of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great and set about strengthening the state, enacting programs of industrialization and agricultural collectivization: he enslaved vast segments of his population to build industries, mine the earth, and gather crops. Under his direction the state pillaged its citizens, dispossessing them of land, factories, homes, and personal wealth, murdering them by the millions in purges designed to crush potential resistance. Whatever legitimacy the state had came from its ability to inspire fear while providing the masses with a modicum of economic security, and from the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which, with its themes of universal justice and the eventual triumph of the working class, accorded well with Russians' messianic view of their country's place in the world. The state's ability to inspire fear began to diminish with the death of Stalin; the end of the USSR began with the thaw of Nikita Khrushchev.

In Soviet days only criminals engaged in commerce for large-scale profit (the state chief among them: it lived off the sale of oil, gold, and gas to the West, often extracted from the earth with slave labor). The hypocrisy of Soviet ideology and the slaughter of the Stalin era deadened respect for law and order. Crooks became heroes. To get by, the masses improved on medieval traditions of deceiving the authorities. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the last thing that Russians wanted to hear about was a new set of obligations that were ostensibly to serve the common good. No viable notion of common good had survived the Soviet decades, when neighbors betrayed neighbors, children

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betrayed their parents, and the state enslaved or murdered its subjects, justifying its actions with words about patriotism and peace on earth. As long as Russians lived in fear, they mouthed state slogans and obeyed. When they ceased being afraid, they in effect told the state, Go to hell.

PUTIN THE TERRIBLE

On New Year's Eve, 1999, Yeltsin resigned and handed over executive power to his Prime Minister, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, a former KGB agent who had recently served as the head of the KGB's successor agency, the Federal Security Service, or FSB. Yeltsin and his entourage chose Putin, a relative unknown, because Putin had the security connections to protect them once Yeltsin left office; and Putin's first deed as acting President was to sign a decree granting Yeltsin immunity from prosecution. After nine years of national impoverishment, privatization scandals, the *mafia* takeover of the business world, the bombardment of the Supreme Soviet, two wars in Chechnya, and the countrywide entrenchment of corruption (not to mention the economic collapse of 1998, which the oligarchs and state officials were rumored to have brought about for their own enrichment), members of the Yeltsin administration had reason to fear for their liberty and even their lives. Thus, to save his skin, Yeltsin left the Kremlin in the hands of an officer of the very agency that had kept the Soviet regime in power through mass murder, expropriation, exile, torture, surveillance, violation of individual liberties, blackmail, and lies.

As the former head of the FSB, Putin may well have had damaging information on all his rivals in the presidential election that was to take place three months after his appointment. The media reported a groundswell of support for Putin among the electorate—impossible to measure in real terms, given the media's obvious bias in his favor, although his stated intent to restore order in Russia did resonate with many. Most of the other candidates gave up the race without a fight, and Putin won the election in the first round. Given that he had come to power on a wave of hysteria about the war in Chechnya (a war he had launched, albeit in response to the Chechen invasion of Dagestan) and panic generated by terrorist explosions that destroyed apartment buildings in several Russian cities (for which, it was rumored, his associates were responsible), it is tempting to conclude that his election resulted from a scenario contrived to dupe the Russian public into choosing a ruler their hated former President had chosen. Even this scenario, however, failed to arouse much interest or anger: Russians expect skulduggery from their politicians.

In his addresses to the public, Putin showed that he understood the parlous condition of his country. Russians, he said, had built only "the carcass of a civic society"; they failed to obey laws; they were demographically moving toward becoming a "senile nation." Most tellingly, he

praised the state security organs, including the FSB, for "guard[ing] Russia's national interests," said Russians were "not ready to abandon traditional dependence on the state and become self-reliant individuals," and declared that they wanted "a restoration of a guiding and regulatory role of the state"—words that left no doubt about his plans.

Since taking office Putin has moved to restore the state. He has set about strengthening the *vertikal' vlasti*, the "vertical line of power"—an oblique way of saying his own authority. Though the President's power was already czar-like, owing to Yeltsin's constitution, it was not enough for Putin. He has redrawn Russia's administrative boundaries along the lines of those of imperial Russia, and in five out of seven of the "new" federal regions he has put former military or intelligence officers in charge. He has launched a campaign to oust governors on corruption charges—governors opposed to the Kremlin, that is. (Corruption serves as a convenient brush with which to tar opponents. Some estimates say that seven in ten government officials are corrupt; the real number may be higher. No matter—when it suits the state, guilt can be manufactured on demand.) He has prosecuted the war in Chechnya to the point of obliterating that republic.

Putin needs pliant and adoring media to ensure an absolutist rule. He has stood behind a proposed "informational security doctrine" that would ban any foreign ownership of media in Russia as a "threat to national security." Some in the State Security Council have opposed the bill, because they believe that Russian journalists are "just as dangerous"; so now there is talk of imposing restrictions on Russian reporters, too. Putin has referred to those who write news unfavorable to the state as "traitors." He has put a KGB veteran in charge of the telecommunications industry. Journalists in the provinces continue to suffer the intimidation and beatings (or worse) that they knew in Yeltsin's years, and similar repression has begun to reach the capital. Last summer the prosecutor general's office moved to indict the oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, the head of Media-Most, which owns Russia's last independent television network, on charges of fraud. The charges may prove true, but given the widespread theft practiced by other oligarchs, pursuing Gusinsky, whose network has voiced strong opposition to Putin's war in Chechnya, amounts to selective prosecution.

For the first time since Soviet days slavishly adoring chronicles of the country's leader have hit the stands in some cities. Putin supported the reinstatement of a slightly modified version of Stalin's national anthem, which had been discarded by Yeltsin. Although Putin is a leader with an "unclear" commitment to democracy in the eyes of many in Western political and media circles, his KGB past speaks volumes to Russians. The sole national-level politician who still advocates Western ideals and democracy, Grigory Yavlinsky, has called the situation with respect to the media and freedom "the worst period in the last ten years." The



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Syracuse University

VIVE GRIFFITH

University of Texas, Austin

ARTHUR LEE

University of Texas, Austin

DAVID S. LEVINSON

New School University

E. J. LEVY

Ohio State University

MEGAN ROSEMAN

Lewis & Clark College

ANTHONY VARALLO

University of Missouri, Columbia

MARY YUKARI WATERS

University of California, Irvine

POETRY

1st Prize

LAUREN WILCOX

University of Florida

2nd Prize

OANA MARIAN

Yale University

3rd Prize

PHILIP ALEXANDER PARDI

University of Texas

Honorable Mention

HEIDI CZERWIEC BLITCH

University of Utah

CHRISTIAN A. CAMPBELL

Duke University

ANGELIN DONOHUE

University of Maryland

FRANK GALLIMORE

University of Oregon

REBECCA GIVENS

Yale University

LINDSAY KNISELY

University of Oregon

LAUREN KRUSKALL

Case Western Reserve University

BRYAN NARENDORF

The Ohio State University

PETER C. L. NOHRNBERG

Yale University

PAMELA SIBLEY

Texas A&M University

ALISON STINE

University of Maryland at College Park

NONFICTION

1st Prize

NATE LIEDERBACH

University of Colorado

2nd Prize

SHERRY BOSLEY

Goucher College

3rd Prize

JENNIFER OSHA

Yale University

Honorable Mention

ANN M. BAUER

University of Iowa

ANDREW COWDERY

Yale University

LISA GROSHONG

University of Alabama

MARK KREWATCH

Antioch University of Los Angeles

MARK C. URBAN

Yale University

1st Prize \$1,000

2nd Prize \$500

3rd Prize \$250

a one-year subscription to
The Atlantic Monthly for
honorable mention

Soviet atmosphere of suspicion and fear is returning to Russia. The very knowledge that a former KGB agent is running the country sends chills down the spine.

Or down some spines. As with Yeltsin, so with Putin: tax collection is state priority No. 1. To fear or not to fear is a question that hinges on whether a Russian has made enough money to dread Putin's tax pillagers or is poor and dispossessed enough to feel spiteful glee when masked tax men break down a wealthy neighbor's door, kick him and his wife to the floor, ransack their belongings, and make off with their passports and financial documents. Yet Russians still steadfastly refuse to file personal tax returns, and businesses continue to flout tax laws (though now perhaps with newfound fear and plans to legalize their affairs in the future). There is talk of granting the tax police ministerial status. Their deeds are glorified in TV police dramas modeled after *Cops*, and a special academy has been set up to train young-

THE SLEEPER

On one of the last days of the installation in darkness
of the unlit procession that would continue its motionless
march
to the end of the world and beyond it staring at nothing
after a ceremony during which mouths were opened
repeatedly but no words were shouted sung or spoken
the dog was carried into the tomb between two lines of
bearers
followed by an orchestra holding silent instruments
and was lowered slowly into its far corner of that day's light
a sleeping dog not a guardian not a living dog
not a dog that had lived until then or had ever been born
a dog known from some life that would not be known again
the sculptor was the first in one file of bearers
and the sculptor's hand was the last to touch the figure
asleep in clay before they left it to its own sleep
and were blindfolded and turned around like planets and
they groped
along the procession of horses chariots armor
to the light they remembered the smells of smoke and
cooking
then voices dogs barking dogs running among houses
the sculptor
watched dogs searching and knowing what they were
looking for
dogs asleep seeing somewhere else while his eye was on
them

—W. S. MERWIN

sters for a future in tax collecting—a profession that may be edging out contract killer in popularity among teenagers, with its scope for material gain and license to employ violence against “enemies of the people.” And as if the new role of the tax police weren't glorious enough, the Orthodox Church has assigned them a patron saint, thereby investing them with a divine right to plunder. Those who have made money, including the oligarchs, understand that in still largely communalist Russia, property rights are not only not inviolate but could be reversed with cheers from the masses. Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky grasped this and have fled abroad rather than risk litigation and imprisonment; many others who have made fortunes have done the same or are plotting to do so. Oligarchs who suffer dispossession will likely see their property either divided among members of Putin's court or renationalized. The notion that any redistribution of wealth will be fair and just is nonsensical in light of recent history: if redistribution takes place, it will favor those in power.

Average Russians continue to suffer abuse daily at the hands of the militia, the traffic police, and corrupt bureaucrats. The state may try them more than once for a crime. They may be detained without charges for seventy-two hours or held in a tuberculosis-ridden pre-trial detention center for years. Opening a business involves as much paperwork and bribery as ever. The *mafia* still extracts *dan* from entrepreneurs. The countrywide decay that began during the Yeltsin years continues, with television towers catching fire, nuclear submarines sinking, military aircraft crashing to earth, apartment buildings exploding from leaks in decrepit gas pipes, and entire regions of the country going without heat and electricity in winter months. Thirty-six percent of the population, or 52 million people, live below the subsistence level, set at a dollar a day. (Putin's promised increase in the minimum monthly wage has added \$1.79, for a total of \$4.74.) The military, despite Putin's pledges to reform it, remains one of the most impoverished segments of society: more than 49 percent of military families live below the poverty line; two thirds of junior officers have no housing; and officers' salaries have declined in real terms by more than 50 percent over the past five years. Putin's actions show his failure to understand that it is the dying economy, not the deteriorated state, that threatens stability and the future of the country. Economic distress and doctrinaire intransigence brought about the fall of the Soviet Union, and they may bring about the fall of Russia: Putin has pledged to restore a “comprehensive system of state regulation of the economy.”

Adequate financing of the state sector of the economy would, it appears, require renationalization of the energy industries that were given away at the rigged auctions of 1995. But at least for now Putin has forsworn confrontation and has reached an agreement with most of the oligarchs that will allow them to keep their spoils—a compromise that

shows where his interests lie. Buoyed by high world oil prices, the oil industry is still the engine of the economy: it provides a third of all state revenues (despite persistent tax arrears). This lends a shine to Russia's fiscal visage that has prompted some Western observers to irrational exuberance and predictions of a new boom. (Russians, however, now more than ever, prefer to send their capital abroad; since Putin took office, capital flight has increased by 30 percent.) Westerners are right about the energy sector, at least: the Russian government is negotiating a deal with the European Union that would double fuel exports to Europe and assure Western investment in leaking pipelines and decrepit rigs.

HUMILIATION IN UNIFORM

One of the most spectacular elements of the Soviet Union's collapse has been Russia's fall from military superpower No. 2 to a country whose army can be neutralized by bands of irregulars fighting with little more than the weapons on their backs. The decay of the military, resulting from decreased funding and the spread of corruption (both of which Yeltsin abetted: he had no interest in maintaining or strengthening an institution that was at best lukewarm toward his rule), was popularly perceived to have led to Russia's humiliating defeat during the first Chechen war, in 1994–1996. Putin promised that if he was elected to the presidency, he would champion the interests of the armed forces and the security services, and those groups overwhelmingly supported his candidacy. Widespread anger at the expansion of NATO—and most of all at NATO's war against (Orthodox Christian) Yugoslavia, in 1999—played a crucial role in Putin's popularity with the public, because superpower status is fundamental to the Russian national identity, which retains much of its messianic character. The notion that Russia's path will always remain separate from that of the West has survived the Gorbachev and Yeltsin years. To be a superpower—and, indeed, to maintain the integrity of the Russian Federation (an entity built, over the course of five centuries, through the conquest and annexation of non-Russian peoples)—a powerful military is indispensable. So what of Russia's armed forces today?

To understand the present condition of the Russian military, and the problems facing the Russian state as a whole, we must examine what lies behind the war in Chechnya. Although it has generated much criticism in human-rights circles (particularly in Western Europe), the war has given rise to relatively little public discontent in Russia, where the conflict is seen as a battle for the Russian Federation. Should the Chechens win independence, they would acquire a segment of the oil pipeline that runs from the Caspian Sea across their territory to Novorossiysk, on the Black Sea. Furthermore, other restive, partly Muslim regions of the federation, from republics in the Caucasus to oil-rich Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, might be tempted to secede.

Getting the lion's share of Caspian oil reserves ranks as

one of the Kremlin's principal domestic and foreign-policy objectives. When Chechen guerrillas invaded the neighboring republic of Dagestan, in 1999, they threatened not only Russia's position on the Caspian Sea but also its alliance with and military bases in Georgia and Armenia—bases Russia needs in order to stymie efforts by Turkey and the West to erode its hegemony in the region. In view of these international implications, it makes sense that Moscow has chosen to emphasize the role played by foreign (mostly Muslim) governments and mercenaries in the Chechen conflict.

Since federal forces reinvaded Chechnya and established a measure of control over its northern lowlands, capital, and main cities, Putin has asserted that the military is conducting not a war but a (largely successful) "anti-terrorist operation" against *band-formirovaniya* ("bandit units"). The result, he maintains, will be a political solution involving the reincorporation of Chechnya into Russia. Media coverage has for the most part been restricted to positive accounts of battles won and children saved, but state television also reports much that does not suggest a sunny return of Kremlin rule: frequent Chechen attacks on Russian forces all over the republic, some of them causing dozens of casualties; Chechen guerrillas' murdering with impunity compatriots who collaborate with Russian authorities; and savage incidents of banditry and kidnapping—not only by the rebels. Russian troops have kidnapped Chechens for ransom; Russian soldiers have sold their weapons to guerrillas in return for cash or narcotics; and the torture of detainees in federal detention centers is routine. All of this has prompted Putin to visit Chechnya and to scold military commanders, including the Minister of Defense, for their incompetence and unprofessionalism. But the war goes on, with no end in sight, and atrocities on both sides continue.

Putin has promised to improve the military through much publicized reforms. Last September the Ministry of Defense announced plans to cut its forces by almost a third, from 1.2 million men to 850,000—a measure that would purportedly allow for a leaner, meaner, and better-paid fighting force and would free up funds for the building of ten new Topol-M ICBMs, Russia's most lethal nuclear missiles. Yet within two weeks an official of the State Security Council announced that troop numbers were in fact still at Soviet-era levels, totaling more than two million servicemen, with another 966,000 in civilian support staff. This declaration exposed the sham of Russia's demilitarization during the Yeltsin years and made a cut of 350,000 men seem insignificant.

Thus it is unclear where the issue of military reform stands. But the blood, gore, and corruption in Chechnya are a reminder that no matter what the numbers are, a band of rebels has managed to tie down the army of what was once the world's second superpower.

Russia's superpower ambitions contrast with its abysmal domestic failures, both military and economic; Putin's promise to fulfill those ambitions bespeaks the same sort of crippling

policy confusion that characterized the Yeltsin era. But no matter how much its army deteriorates, Russia is likely to maintain a nuclear arsenal sufficiently strong to keep NATO from ever launching a “humanitarian” war on its soil. And the ruin that Russian forces have wrought on Chechnya has shown what Moscow is willing to do to keep Russia intact.

ZAIRE WITH PERMAFROST

What does the future hold for Russia? It was Ivan the Terrible’s reign that first made the Kremlin’s power synonymous with the rapine and exploitation of the Russian people. Five centuries of pillaging by the state have meant that Russians expect repression, and only seek to lessen its impact or evade it through stealth. But since the Gorbachev years Russians have taken steps toward reassessing their history and government, have followed politics and voted in the most-open elections they have known, and have enjoyed newfound freedoms of expression, assembly, comportment, and travel. Nevertheless, history suggests that a powerful state, of the sort that Russians have built in the past, would put an end to all that and guarantee corruption, abuse of power, violence, curtailment of liberties, and instability. Now is not the time to resuscitate ideas that brought the country to near collapse in 1991. Putin’s plans to strengthen the state (at least as he envisions it), if carried out, would amount to a national death sentence. Yet the weakened state that existed under Yeltsin left the population prey to the *mafia* and corrupt bureaucrats. Given the logic and propensities of Russian history, there appears to be no end in sight to the country’s decay.

Meanwhile, much of Moscow’s political elite still views Russia as having a Great Power role to play vis-à-vis the United States—a role that, more than economic reform, seems to captivate the Kremlin. (Under both Yeltsin and Putin, Russia has striven to counter the United States by courting alliances with China and India, selling arms and nuclear technology to Iran, and supporting or at least dealing with Iraq, Serbia, North Korea, and Cuba.) Superpower ambitions are inevitable, because Russian civilization and identity are buttressed by a vast and isolating territory, abundant natural resources, and scientific and military capabilities that include nuclear weapons. In view of the ailing economy—Russia’s gross national product today amounts to just four percent of the United States’ GNP—these pretensions are fraught with danger, and Putin would do well to recall that high defense spending helped to bring about the demise of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Putin has declared that he will increase the military budget to “respond to new geopolitical realities, both external and internal threats.” (The budget for last year included a seven percent increase, and Putin has pledged to raise it by 57 percent eventually.) As the state grows stronger, it will once again rob the people to pay the bills. Thus policies aimed at the revival of the state and the pursuance of Great Power ambi-

tions promise only further suffering, exploitation, and decay.

For those who remain. Over the past decade Russia’s population has been shrinking by almost a million a year, owing to a plummeting birth rate and a rising number of deaths from alcoholism and violence. Predictions are astonishingly grave: the country could lose a third of its population (now 146 million) by the middle of the century. This does not factor in new scourges—tuberculosis and HIV, in particular, which have been spreading exponentially since 1998. As its population shrinks, Russia will find itself less and less able to face demographic challenges from China. Overpopulation is pushing the Chinese into the Russian Far East—a trend that at present benefits Russia by bringing it trade and small-scale investment but that could someday lead to ethnically based separatism.

Although the Kremlin’s superpower pretensions may preclude it from becoming a loyal partner of the West, the country’s economic failings, to say nothing of its shrinking population, will eventually prevent Russia from posing a significant threat abroad. Given that Russia is surviving on human, material, and military reserves accrued during the Soviet years, and that Putin has put forward plans that will only worsen his country’s plight, we can draw but one conclusion: Russia is following the path of Mobutu’s Zaire, becoming a sparsely populated yet gigantic land of natural resources exploited by an authoritarian elite as the citizenry sinks into poverty, disease, and despair.

What does this mean for the West? It is difficult to imagine the birth of an ideological conflict between Russia and the West similar to that which led to the Cold War—though Russian nationalist sentiments are likely to increase, and to find expression in ever-more-bellacose pronouncements from the Kremlin, especially if the West and NATO persist in humiliating Moscow with military adventures in its former spheres of influence. Otherwise, to the benefit of the Russian elite, Western businesses will continue to operate in the havens of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where investment, both Russian and foreign, will ensure a well-maintained infrastructure. As regions deteriorate, these two cities are likely to continue developing and growing: Moscow’s population officially stands at nine million but may actually be as high as 12 million. Western governments will continue to buy cheap Russian oil and gas, and will quite possibly invest heavily in the upkeep of those industries. And as for superpower status, in contrast to the Turks under Kemal Atatürk, who voluntarily relinquished their empire in favor of an Anatolian homeland, or the Byzantine Greeks, who fell in battle defending their empire against the Turks, the Russians are likely to face a long, slow, relatively peaceful decline into obscurity—a process that is well under way. ■

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CENTERPIECE

ROGET AND HIS BRILLIANT,¹ UNRIVALED,² MALIGN,³ AND DETESTABLE⁴ THESAURUS

.....
BY SIMON WINCHESTER

Illustrations by David Johnson

¹ keen, perspicacious, sapient

² paramount, predominant,
peerless

³ ill-contrived, mordacious,
harmful

⁴ deplorable, nefarious,
ghastly, accursed

W O R D I M P E R F E C T

Roget's Thesaurus has long been considered one of the great lexicographical achievements in the history of the English language, a reference work of astonishing ubiquity and far-reaching influence. But now the author of The Professor and the Madman—the best-selling tale of the making of the Oxford English Dictionary—questions the legacy of the definitive list of synonyms that the brilliant Peter Mark Roget compiled 150 years ago. Is the name Roget becoming a synonym for intellectually second-rate?

The writing world may at last be having second thoughts about Peter Mark Roget, Esquire—polymath, physician, cinema inventor, slide-rule maker, chess master, lexical scholar, and the man who gave us one of the best-known reference works in the English language. One hint as to his possibly altered standing comes from the latest version of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which, although Roget was an editor of the seventh edition and a contributor of more than 300,000 words to it, gives him somewhat short shrift today, with an entry of a mere twenty lines. On the same pair of pages onto which his life is squeezed are far-more-substantial articles about figures one must suppose are now more deserving of note: the Korean leader Roh Tae Woo; the Belgian statesman Charles Rogier; the Huguenot Duke of Rohan; the author of a book called *Australian Totemism*, one Géza Róheim; and a murdered Nazi storm trooper named Ernst Röhm.

But a more potent clue is to be found whenever one tries, using modern equipment, to write anything about Roget. The spell-checker that is provided on most computers these days has no listing whatsoever for *Roget*. The old-fashioned *Oxford English Dictionary* has a listing, naturally, and makes it clear that the word—as in, for example, *to look it up in Roget*—is now so well known as to have the status of an eponym. (It has to be said, however, that the name is not in Oxford's *Dictionary of Eponyms*.) But no readily available computer-program-integrated dictionary seems to agree with the *OED*: none I used lists the word, even though Microsoft Word (which not unreasonably sports its company name in its own dictionary) has a fair enough share of other eponymous and similar words and phrases that might be thought of as equally significant—*boycott*, *thermos*, *Kodak*, and *bowler hat* among them.

No, if you attempt to write the word *Roget* using any of Bill Gates's spectacular software, you get a squiggly red line underneath, indicating that you have written a word the software doesn't recognize. Even worse, if you happen to enter the same word in the thesaurus that comes with Microsoft Word (but which is made under contract by a firm with the name—somewhat less than encouraging for lexicographers—Soft-Art Inc.), you will be obligingly informed that what you must have been thinking of, when you were so slack as to write by mistake the name of literature's most celebrated helpmeet, was in fact the word *rogue*. *Don't know a good synonym for philistine? Why not look it up in rogue?*

Yet what some will see as just another melancholy comment on the degraded state of contemporary language has for me turned out to be rather helpful. I bless the operatives at Soft-Art and their fine economy of word association. For what I am trying to grapple with, and what might otherwise have resulted in little more than a hymn of praise to a man I see (for his myriad other achievements) as one of the great unsung heroes of all time, has been distilled into an

elegant and nicely challenging proposition: Perhaps Peter Mark Roget actually deserves to be regarded as the very rogue that this sparkling new twenty-first-century thesaurus would make him. If so, it is because the evident decline in language is something for which at least partial blame must be laid at his door; it has its origins in the extraordinary eponymous volume that he single-handedly created almost 150 years ago.

To put it more forcefully: *Roget's Thesaurus* no longer merits the unvarnished adoration it has over the years almost invariably received. It should be roundly condemned as a crucial part of the engine work that has transported us to our current state of linguistic and intellectual mediocrity.

More than 30 million copies of *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* have been sold since the book was first published, in London, by the firm of Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, in May of 1852. It is, by any standard, one of the most popular reference books ever written—a “treasure-house” indeed, as *thesaurus* translates from the Greek. Rare is the household without a dog-eared copy somewhere—perhaps a holdover from school days; perhaps bought years ago with good intent, along with *Merriam-Webster* and *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*; perhaps twinned with a book of cross-word puzzles or acrostics. The motives for owning *Roget*—improving that essay, finding that eight-letter word beginning with *t*, getting the *mot juste* for that Rotary Club or senate-campaign speech—are manifold.

There have been countless editions. Roget himself presided over twenty-five of the twenty-eight—each one subtly different—that were published during the two decades in which he continued to work on his magnum opus. The book has been published in America continuously since 1854. A considerable industry has arisen alongside *Roget*, devoted to books with a similar function and with similar titles. Many of these works once used the word *Roget* in their titles, as the name of the original author or, quite often, as a purely descriptive term. C.O. Sylvester Mawson's *A Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms; Being a Presentation of Roget's Thesaurus . . . in Alphabetical Form* (1931), is one example. Amazon lists 935 works for sale that include *thesaurus* in the title. (An impressive number, one might think—though it is perhaps worth noting that the same catalogue lists 21,782 products that incorporate the word *dictionary* in their titles, and 10,748 that call themselves encyclopedias. *Roget* may sell phenomenally well, but it has much less competition than do many other great works of reference.)

However defining and useful *Roget's Thesaurus* may have proved to be over the past 150 years, it was not the first book of its kind. Actually it would be more accurate to say that earlier books performed the function that *Roget's Thesaurus* is *believed* to perform—a distinction that makes it necessary to focus at the outset on three questions: What books of similar intent existed in published form before 1852? What exactly was Roget trying to do when he first sat down to assemble his famous work? And what did he in fact achieve?

The answer to the third question is, superficially at least, self-evident: *Roget's Thesaurus* is a stylish and comprehensive list of synonyms. The other questions are less straightforward, however, and to answer them we must first consider sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English society—particularly the eagerness among its most prominent members to make sure they looked and sounded elegant and learned.

This period of English history was witness to an explosion of intellectual energy. It was the time of Newton and Dryden, Bunyan and Purcell, Halley and Wren, Aphra Behn and Beau Nash. These great thinkers and creators radiated energy; the nation basked in their glory; and those who were rich and grand

THESAURUS
OF
ENGLISH WORDS AND PHRASES,
CLASSIFIED AND ARRANGED
SO AS
TO FACILITATE THE EXPRESSION OF IDEAS
AND ASSIST IN
LITERARY COMPOSITION.

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FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
MEMBER OF THE SENATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
OF THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, ETC. OF MONTREAL, LIVERPOOL,
BRISTOL, QUEBEC, NEW YORK, PHILADELPHIA, TORONTO, AND STOCKHOLM.
AUTHOR OF
THE "MILKWEED TREATISE ON ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE PHYSIOLOGY,"
Etc.

"It is impossible we should thoroughly understand the nature of the science, unless we first properly consider and arrange the terms connected with it."—Euseb. Hieronymus.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.
1852.

*The first edition of Roget's Thesaurus,
published in 1852*



The style of the times was all about glitter and reflection: the houses, the parties, the gardens, the games. Fashionable foppishness extended to the laboriously convoluted language.

enough but less talented did their corporate best to sparkle in all the reflected luminance.

The style of the times was all about glitter and reflection: the houses, the parties, the gardens, the games, the flowery rituals of mannered society—all pointed to a fascination with the baroque complications of an ever accelerating civilization. The dress of the day suggested much the same. Fashionable foppishness also exceeded all reason in what may strike us today as the most ludicrous of English affectations at that time: the laboriously convoluted language. The way the upper classes and those who aspired to join them tortured the tongue positively beggars belief.

Nor was there any irony in the widespread use of what were called (dismissively, by truly learned folk) “inkhorn terms.” The language spoken in the overheated “withdrawing rooms” of Belgrave Square and Piccadilly was larded with them: phrases such as *ingent affabilitie* and *dominical superiorite*; verbs such as *revolute* and *deruncinate*; and adjectives—rather fewer, mercifully—such as *magnifical* and *splendidious*. The relative lack of adjectives hints that perhaps some vocabulary god thought this nonsense was dreadful enough without further qualification.

In due course, in 1604, a Coventry schoolteacher named Robert Cawdrey came to the aid of those who were floundering. He gathered together some 2,500 words, arranged them in alphabetical order, and offered his volume, 120 pages and bound octavo.

The book was called *A Table Alphabeticall ... of Hard Usuall English Wordes*, and it became—this first-ever true dictionary of the English language—a best seller. Cawdrey noted without a hint of condescension that he intended it “for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons.”

For a while Cawdrey’s book did the trick. But before long one of the axiomatically inherent flaws of alphabetical dictionaries in general became apparent: it is not possible to look up a word if you don’t know what that word is.

“Of course,” one would say today. “That stands to reason.” But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the cataloguing of words was an altogether brand-new skill, it took time to understand. And once it had sunk in, the need arose for quite another kind of book—one that would lead the inquirer to a particular word if he knew roughly what it was that he wanted to say but had no firm idea of the assemblage of letters and syllables that would enable him to say it.

The first notable book to do so was by one John Trusler, and its portmanteau title was *The Difference Between Words Esteemed Synonymous in the English Language; and the Proper Choice of Them Determined*. Trusler’s volume (one of the first to incorporate a word derived from *synonym* in the title), more than any other, was the true precursor if not specifically of *Roget’s Thesaurus* then of what the *Thesaurus* has since erroneously (as we shall see) been perceived to be. It was, in essence, the first real synonym finder.

Trusler’s work answered the prayers of the drawing-room dandy, because it meant that at last he could look up a word without knowing what it was. He simply had to look up a word of similar meaning, and lo!—if his synonym finder was a good one (as John Trusler’s was), then a suitable word would be listed; he could select one and promptly delight the world.

Trusler’s book, though, was essentially a catalogue of synonyms: it merely listed them, noting their existence but making no attempt to prescribe which words should be used in which situations. It was left to a friend of Samuel Johnson’s, Hester Lynch Piozzi, to create the first prescriptive work on British synonymy. Although Piozzi’s book had many detractors (Roget was probably among them), it also persuaded literate Britain to start thinking hard about a question that lies at the core of this examination of *Roget*: what exactly is a synonym?

Piozzi’s book, *British Synonymy; or, an Attempt at Regulating the Choice of*

Words in Familiar Conversation, came out in 1794, nearly sixty years before Roget's first thesaurus was published—but, according to his writings, only a decade before Roget started planning it. The links between Piozzi's book and his are vague, but her volume's fame was such that he no doubt knew of it. *British Synonymy* was published in Dublin and ran to 427 pages, and it was directed, as D. J. Emblen wrote in his biography *Peter Mark Roget* (1970), at "those coming up in society and ... eligible foreigners" who might not be familiar with the shades and nuances of the language, and who might want to avoid embarrassing themselves.

The language of the day was becoming ever more complex: thanks to new discoveries in science and geography, and to the ever multiplying energies of writers, vocabulary choices were increasing almost by the day. To use English properly was, in a word, daunting. Opportunities for making oneself look and sound foolish were everywhere. Hence the need for the balm of Piozzi's enormous book. She would show one how to sound one's best.

The way she tried to accomplish this, mind you, ruffled some feathers. It was unimportant to her if what one said was lexically imperfect—that was just a matter of pedantry. Style and the veneer of sophistication were all. "Synonymy," she reassured her readers, with a remark that would have infuriated Roget, "has more to do with elegance than truth."

The organization of Piozzi's book is peculiar compared with that of modern synonymies. She grouped what she regarded as synonymous words together and then explained in a longish paragraph the nuances that distinguished them. Take, for example (as quoted in Emblen's book),

AFFABILITY, CONDESCENSION, COURTESY, GRACIOUSNESS

Are nearly synonymous, though common discourse certainly admits that an equal may be affable, which I should still think wrong in a printed book, and unpleasing everywhere, because the word itself seems to imply superiority. We will allow however that the *lofty courtesy* of a princess loses little of its *graciousness*, although some *condescension* be left visible through the exterior *affability*; but that, among people where talents or fortune only make the difference, a strain of polished familiarity, or familiar politeness (call it as you will) is the behaviour most likely to attract affectionate esteem.

In Piozzi's view, a slight but important difference of class association existed in the employment of these four words. The manner in which each was used—except among those whose "talents or fortune" rather than rank distinguished them—depended on who was being affable or courteous to whom: a duke might be affable to a commoner; it behooved a commoner to be courteous in return, and most decidedly not affable.

Other synonymies were published between Piozzi's and Roget's—the biggest and most durable being George Crabb's work of 1816, *English Synonymes Explained, in Alphabetical Order; With Copious Illustrations and Explanations Drawn From the Best Writers*. It was a cumbersome book, widely criticized for being prolix in style and maddeningly circular in argument. But it, too, answered a seemingly urgent need: sixteen editions were printed over the thirty-six years before Roget swept the board.

Crabb's success spawned other synonymies: in the decade before *Roget* fourteen synonym finders were published, known today to the small fraternity of thesaurus collectors by the names of their compilers—among them William Carpenter (1842), George Graham (1846), James Jermyn (1848), and James Rawson (1850). Many such books could have helped users to jog their memories. It is rather charming to suppose that such a book, slipped furtively from a partygoer's pocket, might act as a sort of hip flask for the conversationally parched.

BRITISH SYNONYMY;

OR,

A N A T T E M P T

AT

REGULATING THE CHOICE OF WORDS

IN

FAMILIAR CONVERSATION.

INSCRIBED,

With Sentiments of Gratitude and Respect, to such of her
Foreign Friends as have made English Literature
their peculiar Study,

BY

HESTER LYNCH PIOZZI.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR G. G. AND J. ROBINSON, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCXCIV.

Hester Lynch Piozzi's British Synonymy
(1794)

Examination of any words thought to be synonymous reveals a congruency of range but not an identical meaning. Take an illustrative example: *ship*, *vessel*.



The image may strike us as more than a little awkward, but perhaps the etiquette of the time made the use of such a little book no trickier than the use of a phrase book when abroad.

But although all these volumes listed hundreds upon hundreds of almost interchangeable words and phrases, and gave helpful hints as to how each might be suitably employed, none of them—with the possible exception of Piozzi's—took care to examine the subtle notion of the synonym itself. None of the editors wondered—at least not in print—why a language as complex and finely tuned as English would include any two words that meant *exactly* the same thing. Was there such a thing as a real synonym? Or had every word been created for a unique purpose? Roget, who began as early as 1805 to consider the need for some formal classification of the chaotic entity that was then the English language, was fascinated by these questions. The answers he constructed led him, fifty years later, to the creation of this organizational masterpiece that bears his name.

Consider some of the words that are listed in the *OED* (under *synonym*) as examples of as-near-as-it-comes synonymy. The first are *serpent* and *snake*. Are these words true synonyms? In terms of pure definition, yes—sort of. *Serpent* is defined in the *OED* as “any of the scaly limbless reptiles regarded as having the properties of hissing and ‘stinging’; *Zool.* a reptile of the group *Ophidia*; a snake.” *Snake* is defined as “one or other of the limbless vertebrates constituting the reptilian order *Ophidia* (characterized by a greatly elongated body, tapering tail, and smooth scaly integument), some species of which are noted for their venomous properties; an ophidian; a serpent.” The difference at this level is minuscule: one definition is more comprehensive, mentioning the vertebrated skeleton and the scaly integument; the other is somewhat more colorful, accentuating the hissing noise that the beast is able to emit.

Were this all, one might agree that the two words are perfect synonyms. But the *OED*, complete as always, continues its definition of *serpent*, observing that nowadays, in ordinary use, the word is “applied chiefly to the larger and more venomous species; otherwise only *rhetorical* ... or with reference to serpent-worship.”

Therein is the suggestion of reptilian synonymy blown suddenly asunder. For *serpent* is indeed the word we choose when we want to denote a snake that is bigger and nastier than most, and *snake* is the word we choose to describe any smooth and elongated creature that skitters from beneath the lawnmower blades. We say, on the one hand, “There is a *snake* in the basement” and, on the other, that missionaries were once thrown into “pits filled with *serpents*.” But we don’t proclaim there to be a *serpent* in the garden shed, and if we told a listener that a missionary was in a pit full of *snakes*, we would realize from the resulting questions—Were they big? Were they venomous?—that we had used the word wrongly, poorly, or incautiously. (This leads to another supposed synonymy: *venom* and *poison*. The words, however, are not exactly synonymous, because one can speak with *venom* yet perhaps not quite with *poison*. *Venom* is both a substance and a tone; *poison* is more a matter of chemistry.)

Examination of any words thought to be synonymous reveals a congruency of range but not an identical meaning. Take some other illustrative related examples from the *OED*: *ship*, *vessel*; *compassion*, *fellow-feeling*, *sympathy*; *enormous*, *excessive*, *immense*; *glad*, *happy*, *joyful*, *joyous*; *kill*, *slay*, *slaughter*; *grieve*, *mourn*, *lament*, *sorrow*. Some are very close indeed; there is little to distinguish a ship from a vessel, except that one doesn’t say *fishing ship* or *war vessel*—suggesting that a *vessel* is likely to be engaged in peaceful activities, whereas a *ship* can have a more menacing role. One cannot quite imagine Nelson’s having spoken of *vessels* on the horizon off Cape Trafalgar, or any dockside idler’s speaking of the handsome lines of the *ship* that has just brought lobsters back from the Outer

Banks. (In truth, he would probably say *boat*.) Others on the list are more obviously distinguishable. Sometimes the distinction is a matter of degree: one *kills* a man; one *slays* his child; one *slaughters* the villagers who sheltered the family. On other occasions the context suggests one choice rather than another: one feels *compassion* for the villagers in such circumstances, but *fellow-feeling* for the brother of the first who had to die.

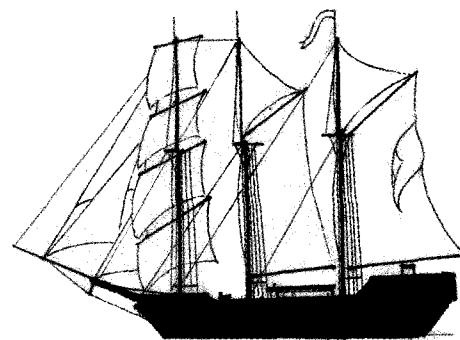
The practices surrounding synonymy, which seem to have come into being at around the time Roget was beginning to codify the language (after Samuel Johnson had created his dictionary but before the members of the Philological Society of London had commenced work on the all-encompassing *OED*), are really quite simple. Currently, the high priest of this field is Ladislav Zgusta, a scholar of Czech extraction (reinforcing the notion that English is often more scrupulously regarded by those who come from less than pure English stock; James Murray, of the *OED*, was proudly a Scot, and Roget came from a Swiss Huguenot family). To be absolute synonyms, Zgusta says, words must be the same in three distinct ways: They must have the same *designatum*—that is, the same essential qualities. They must have the same *connotation*—the same associated features of meaning. And they must occupy the same *range* of usage and application—the contexts in which they are generally used must be identical.

Very few words satisfy this formidable set of criteria. Most of those that do are technical. In his standard work on lexicography, *Dictionaries* (1984), the near-legendary authority Sidney Landau offered as an example ten absolute synonyms, agreeing in designatum, connotation, and range, for the mad-cow-disease-related human ailment that is currently terrifying England and threatening France—Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, widely known as CJD. The variants that Landau listed include *Jakob-Creutzfeldt disease*, *spongiform encephalopathy*, and *Jones-Nevin syndrome*. (The disease afflicting England, with ninety-one known cases and perhaps thousands more expected, is in fact now known, confusingly for my purposes here, as *New-Variant CJD*—and is different from Landau’s plain-vanilla CJD. The new version varies more in terms of pathology than of lexical standing.)

The synonyms listed by the *OED* fall short of Zgusta’s standards in a variety of ways. *Serpent* and *snake* have the same designatum—each is a long, slithery, cold-blooded, and scaly reptile. And they have more or less the same connotation. But they have very different ranges of use, as I have shown. So with only two of the three criteria satisfied, *serpent* and *snake* are not absolute synonyms: they are simply *near* synonyms, not to be substituted for each other without care and attention to the context.

Much the same can be said for *beast* and *brute*, or *mirth* and *cheerfulness*. The words in each pair share a designatum but not a connotation or range of possible use. A *brute* is invariably untamed; a *beast* often is, but he need not be. We can say “a *beast* of burden” or “a *beast* of the field”; we would never say “a *brute* of burden” and probably would not say “a *brute* of the field”—though we might allow “*brute* of the forest,” since the word here reinforces an image in which all is mystery and secret danger.

An awareness of the nuances of synonymy, then, is fundamental to the speaking and writing of good English. Merely cataloguing synonyms, uncritically offering up lists of alternative words from which a speaker or writer may choose, makes for something less happy. Roget realized this back at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the literate world was awash in dictionaries, thesauri, lexicons, and other guides for the betterment of verbal display. His goal was to make sure that what was written and spoken and read was impeccable. To this end he began a study of the language with the primary aim of classifying it and then distilling from that classification a guide to how it might best be made to work.



One doesn’t say *fishing ship* or *war vessel*—suggesting that a *vessel* is likely to be engaged in peaceful activities, whereas a *ship* can have a more menacing role.



Peter Mark Roget in 1835

Peter Mark Roget, born in London on January 18, 1779, was in myriad ways a most extraordinary man. I said earlier that he was a polymath, and in the literal sense of the word—"a person of much or varied learning"—he truly was. Although the term is still widely used today, few men or women in Western societies are genuinely polymathic. In Britain the physician, philosopher, playwright, librettist, and writer Jonathan Miller springs to mind as a possibility; in America, sad to say, despite some astonishingly bright people, no one fits the bill.

Roget seems to have been interested in and learned about almost everything. I first came across him when I was investigating the circumstances of the 1831 awarding of a medal by the Geological Society of London. A geologist named William Smith, who had for many years been ill-used by his peers, was, after a scandalous delay, being formally recognized. I wanted to know who those peers were, and who had so wisely engineered Smith's reappraisal. I needed a list of those who attended the award ceremony.

The Geological Society had the relevant papers in its archives, and the dusty volume holding them was duly brought to me. It was opened carefully by a librarian, who found the proceedings of the meeting and scanned the handwritten list of those present. It was much as I had expected: the meeting had been chaired by the renowned Adam Sedgwick, and the attendees included William Broderip, the Reverend William Whewell, Leonard Horner, Captain James Vetch, the Henry De la Beche who would go on to be the first head of the British Geological Survey, Professor Edward Turner, the great Silurian expert Roderick Murchison, and one Dr. P. M. Roget. The librarian gulped. "Bless my soul," she said. "Do you think it could be *him*?" We looked in the index of members and found that Peter Mark Roget had indeed been a fellow of the Geological Society—and of many, many other august bodies besides.

The title page of the first edition of his *Thesaurus* offers tantalizing clues to his brilliance: his geological inclinations are shown only in the string of initials after his name ("M.D., F.R.S., F.R.A.S., F.G.S."), but he is also identified as "Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians; Member of the Senate of the University of London; of the Literary and Philosophical Societies etc. of Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, Quebec, New York, Haarlem, Turin and Stockholm. Author of the 'Bridgewater Treatise on Animal and Vegetable Physiology,' etc."

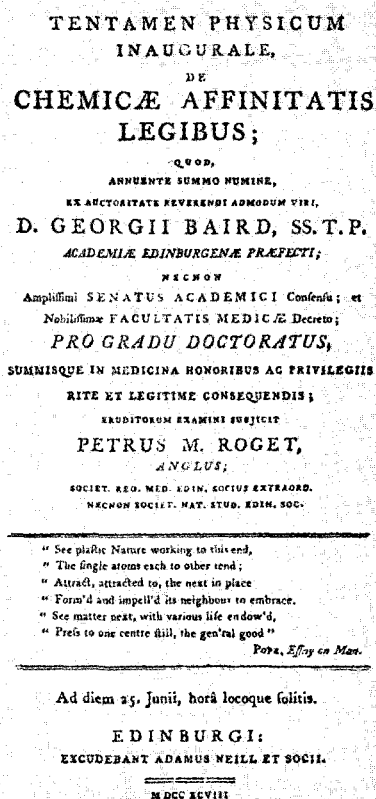
The "etc." shrouds an array of other achievements. Even the sparse *Britannica* entry mentions that Roget invented the so-called log-log slide rule, that he was the secretary of London's fabled Royal Society, and that he was a philologist. A cursory look at his scores of published papers attests to his many other interests (and the fact that he wrote some of these papers in French, German, and Latin as well as English shows his formidable linguistic abilities, stemming from his Swiss Huguenot roots).

Roget's first published works were purely medical, though wide-ranging by any standards: a study of the effects of inhaling laughing gas, a test for detecting the presence of arsenic, how the skin changes color if a patient ingests silver nitrate, on sweating, on tetanus, on voluntary action of the iris, on perception and feeling in animals, on epilepsy, on the medical care of prisoners. By midlife he was starting to branch out to other topics. In 1815, when the rest of Europe was preoccupied with Waterloo, he published a paper titled "A New Instrument for Performing Mechanically the Involution and Evolution of Numbers"—that is, the slide rule. Three years later he produced papers on the kaleidoscope and Dante. He was fascinated by chess problems, too, and one of his more amusing papers shows that it is possible (if not necessarily desirable) to move a knight across every square of the board.

Then, in 1825, came his paper "Explanation of an Optical Deception in the Appearance of the Spokes of a Wheel Seen Through Vertical Apertures," which

- cute, prosecute. *Informal*: pull off.
performance *noun* The act of beginning and carrying through to completion; discharge, effectuation, execution, prosecution. See DO in Index. — See also behavior, interpretation.
- performer** *noun* See player.
- perfume** *noun* See fragrance.
- perfume** *verb* See scent.
- perfunctory** *adjective* Performed or performing automatically and impersonally; automatic, mechanical. See CONCERN in Index.
- perhaps** *adverb* See maybe.
- peril** *noun* See danger.
- peril** *verb* See endanger.
- perilous** *adjective* See dangerous.
- perimeter** *noun* See border, circumference.
- period** *noun* 1. A specific length of time characterized by the occurrence of certain conditions or events: season, span, stretch, term. See TIME in Index. 2. An interval regarded as a distinct evolutionary or developmental unit: phase, stage. See TIME in Index. — See also age, end, time.
- periodic** *adjective* See intermittent, recurrent.
- periodical** *adjective* See intermittent, recurrent.
- periodically** *adverb* See intermittently.
- peripatetic** *adjective* See nomadic.
- periphery** *noun* See border, circumference.
- periphrastic** *adjective* See wordy.
- perish** *verb* See die.
- perjure** *verb* See lie².
- perjured** *adjective* See perjurious.
- perjurer** *noun* See liar.
- performance** + **perplexed**
- perjurious** *adjective* Marked by lying under oath: forsworn, perjured. See RAVE in Index.
- perjury** *noun* See mendacity.
- perk up** *verb* See encourage, recover.
- permanent** *adjective* See continuing.
- permeate** *verb* See charge.
- permissible** *adjective* Capable of being allowed: admissible, allowable, *slang*: kosher. See ALLOW in Index.
- permission** *noun* The granting of an action, especially when done by one in authority: allowance, approbation, approval, authorization, consent, endorsement, leave², license, permit, sanction. *Informal*: OK. See ALLOW in Index.
- permit** *verb* 1. To neither forbid nor prevent: allow, have, let, suffer, tolerate. See ALLOW in Index. 2. To give one's consent to: allow, approve, authorize, consent, endorse, let, sanction. *Informal*: OK. See ALLOW in Index. 3. To afford an opportunity for: admit, allow, let. See ALLOW in Index. — See also enable.
- permit** *noun* See license, permission.
- permutation** *noun* See change.
- pernicious** *adjective* See destructive, virulent.
- perorate** *verb* See rant.
- perpendicular** *adjective* See vertical.
- perpetrate** *verb* See commit.
- perpetual** *adjective* See continual, endless.
- perpetuate** *verb* See immortalize.
- perpetuity** *noun* See endlessness, eternity.
- perplex** *verb* See complicate, confuse.
- perplexed** *adjective* See confused.





*Roget's medical-school dissertation,
University of Edinburgh, 1798*

is regarded as seminal by modern historians of the cinema. The impetus for the paper came about by chance. Early one morning soon after his marriage, at home in Bloomsbury, Roget, according to Emblen, had been gazing up idly from his basement kitchen, from behind a vertical venetian blind, at the passing traffic. The slats of the blind, he suddenly noticed, broke the movements of passing carriage wheels into a jerky series of still pictures. Depending on the speed of the carriage and the position of his eyes, the spokes of the wheel appeared to bend, to curve sometimes backward, sometimes forward. When he moved his head up and down, he noticed that the image changed. He dashed outside and paid a driver a shilling to drive his carriage back and forth along the street while Roget jotted down notes and made sketches. All the while his new wife, Mary, was upstairs tapping her feet, waiting with the breakfast kedgeree cooling in the dining room. Life as Mrs. Peter Mark Roget was, she soon came to understand, invariably odd.

The paper her husband then published led in time to what Marshall McLuhan and others recognized, in Emblen's words, as "another dimension for human existence"—the motion-picture industry. For, as Roget concluded, "an impression made by a pencil of rays on the retina, if sufficiently vivid, will remain for a certain time after the cause has ceased." Persistence of vision had been discovered; the Zoetrope, the Praxinoscope, and the CinemaScope were just waiting to be invented, and 6,000 miles westward Hollywood awaited its founding.

But there was another, more soberly philosophical side to Roget's raft of achievements and ambitions. He seems to have been—sentimental though this may sound in today's cynical climate—a thoroughly *good* person, suffused with ideals about the society of which he was a privileged member. He held a profound belief in the right of ordinary men and women to know things—to be able fully to appreciate the wonders and complexities of the world. He was influenced by Jeremy Bentham's ideas of utilitarianism, which sought to promote the spread of happiness to the greatest possible number of people. He offered his medical services free to those who couldn't pay. He was a keen supporter of preventive medicine—urging reforms, for example, in London's water supply (and proposing a method of water filtration through sand that is still in use today). He was a founding member of the short-lived Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and he wrote a series of sixpenny treatises—on electricity, galvanism, magnetism, and electromagnetism—that were intended to help poorer and less educated people learn what he and his kind already had the privilege of knowing.

He also (as already mentioned) contributed about 300,000 words to the well-regarded seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Of these, 150,000 words went for one major treatise, Physiology; the remainder were divided appropriately among the articles Ant, Apiary, Baldinger, Sir Joseph Banks, Barthez, Beddoes, Bee, Bichat, Brocklesby, Broussonet, Camper, Crawford, Currie, Deaf & Dumb, Kaleidoscope, and Phrenology (of which he was deeply scornful). Although some of these articles have survived, much cut, into the modern era (an article on Marie-François-Xavier Bichat, the French founder of the science of histology, is still there, and twice as long as the article on the man who first authored it), Roget's name does not survive in the index of the *Britannica's* contributors; today "PMR" is a blameless French museum curator named Pierre Rosenberg.

It remains one of the more curious aspects of Roget's life that in this fury of intellectual and socially reforming energy his deep interest in the English language did not become fully apparent until he was in late middle age. He was nearly seventy when, still living in his London townhouse, he began work on his *Thesaurus*, having just been forced from his post at the Royal Society to make way for younger, cleverer, more energetic scientists.

Roget was by no means bitter—he knew well his own scientific strengths and weaknesses, and he would have been the first to acknowledge that his great achievements to date, largely in the fields of description and classification, had not been marked by brio and inspiration. He settled down to his retirement, and yet equipped himself with a grand plan: if the God in whom he believed so implicitly allowed him sufficient time and energy (he was in fact granted a further twenty-one years, all of them healthy), he, by writing and thinking and organizing, would bestow on the kingdom of language the same order that Linnaeus had given to the kingdoms of animals and plants.

Such an ordering, Roget came to believe, would not just answer an intellectual need—it might well have benefits for society as a whole. He mentioned in the *Thesaurus*'s introduction that it might even help to fulfill his long-cherished dream of fostering the birth of a universal language—"that splendid aspiration of philanthropists."

Ever since the turn of the century, when he first began delivering medical lectures in Manchester and London, Roget had carried a succession of notebooks. Few, if any, of the originals survived the fires of World War II. The notebooks contained list after list of words that appeared to Roget to be near synonyms or—as the lists lengthened and the notebooks multiplied—to belong to the same philosophical groupings. Roget's realization as a young man that words could be placed in classes would later underpin his making of the *Thesaurus*. This is the essential difference between Roget's accomplishment and that of the other thesaurus makers before and since: his was a *conceptual* thesaurus, whereas the others were merely arranged alphabetically or otherwise organized to be useful.

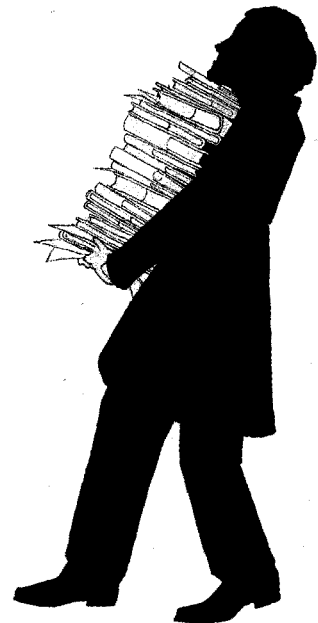
There is no doubt that Roget aimed to produce a volume that was likely to be helpful to some users. In his preface he used the word *desideratum*—he was creating something he felt was *required* or *desired*. The book was designed "to supply, with respect to the English language, a desideratum hitherto unsupplied in any language; namely, a collection of the words it contains and of the idiomatic combinations peculiar to it, arranged, not in alphabetical order as they are in a Dictionary, but according to the *ideas* which they express."

Tom McArthur, the editor of the monthly magazine *English Today*, wrote in the *Oxford Companion to the English Language* that Roget's clear intent was "not . . . to define or discriminate [words], but to arrange them in synonymous and antonymous groups; it serves as both a word-finder and a prompter of the memory regarding words one knows but could not recall to mind."

Yet—and this is why I feel his book proved an ultimate and unwitting disservice to the language—Roget aimed, in selecting his supposed readership, very high indeed. His sixpenny tracts for diffusing knowledge may well have been intended for the artless and the educationally impoverished. His *Thesaurus*, on the other hand, was meant for users equipped with more finely honed intellects and with a very real lexical intuition. He surely never imagined that businessmen, students, and politicians would one day help to make his book such a commercial success. Had he done so, he might have organized his work in a signally different way.

His nobly Platonic vision was that the language could come to be seen as an ordered part of the cosmos, amply reflective of divine will and inspiration. He took an Aristotelian approach to his task as well, marshaling his subject according to the strictest logic. His organization was clearly of the moment: he believed in all sincerity that from out of the miasma of Victorian intellectual confusion could rise a gleaming pillar of lexical glory, a totem to the God who had made it all.

Once he had established his conceptual framework, he concluded that all



Roget carried a succession of notebooks. They contained list after list of words that appeared to be near synonyms, or to belong to the same philosophical groupings.

words could be placed in one of six classes. "The purpose of this work," he wrote in the introduction to the first edition, "is not to explain the signification of words, but simply to classify and arrange them according to the sense in which they are now used, and which I presume to be already known to the reader." Those six classes indicate his staggering polymathy: Abstract Relations, Space, Matter, Intellect, Volition, Sentient and Moral Powers.

The first three cover the external world: Abstract Relations encompasses concepts such as order, number, and time; Space encompasses words relating to size and movement; Matter encompasses the physical world and the way in which people experience it with the five senses. The second three classes relate to the interior world of human beings: Intellect encompasses matters of the mind; Volition acts of will; and Sentient and Moral Powers (or, as modern *Roget* editors now call it, Emotion, Religion and Morality) the more profound matters of the heart and soul. As we can perhaps already see, it would take an extraordinary mind to discern such order and to impose it on the language we use.

Some might suggest that Roget was rather out of touch in assuming that such things were already known to or understood by his potential readers. Further, such an assumption, they say, casts doubt on Roget's utilitarian ideals. For how on earth could an average user understand something that few trained lexicographers—and, indeed, few philosophers of language—can properly comprehend (let alone agree on) today?

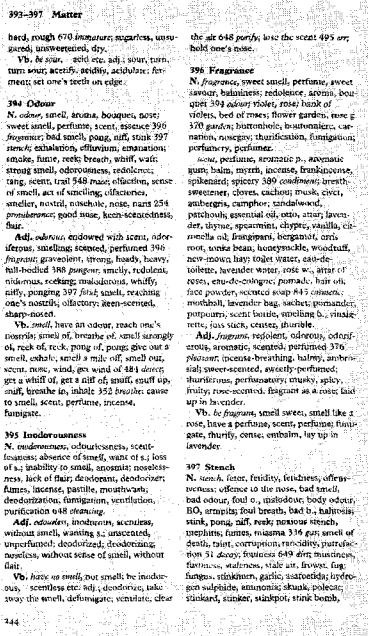
But that seems not to matter: a glance at a modern Longman edition of *Roget's Thesaurus*, published now by Penguin Press (1998) and edited by Betty Kirkpatrick, shows that the classification structure survives. However incomprehensible it may be, it is still the basis for the real *Thesaurus*, a century and a half later. Only in matters of the heart and soul has it been slightly changed, and only, in truth, for cosmetic reasons. The words within have changed, of course, with the times and the fashions—which is true of any thesaurus, dictionary, encyclopedia, or other work of reference that passes through new editions over the years.

To illustrate the cleverness of Roget's extraordinary classification system, let us track in the Penguin edition all the way through a single class of thought to its logical conclusion—to what, if we compared this with the Linnaean system of classifying life, we would call the thought's linguistic species or subspecies. Let us take the conceptual class Volition.

"Volition: the exercise of the will" is first divided into Individual Volition (the will of one) and Social Volition (the will of many). Under Individual Volition are five subclasses: Volition in General, Prospective Volition, Voluntary Action, Antagonism, and Results of Action.

Let us look at Voluntary Action, which may be Simple or Complex, and let us select Simple. The Heads—the paragraphs full of words, organized by part of speech and according to whether they represent the idea or its precise opposite—that fall within this classification are self-explanatory: Action, Activity, Haste, Exertion, Fatigue, Agent, Workshop, and their opposites, which are Inaction, Inactivity, Leisure, Repose, and Refreshment. Agent and Workshop, being neutral aspects, do not have obvious opposites, of course.

Under one of those Heads—let us choose Haste—are about 200 words and phrases that can properly be used to express portions of the range of this single idea. Some of them are nouns: *dispatch*, *urgency*, *impetuosity*. Rather more of them are adjectives: *hot-headed*, *breakneck*, *slapdash*, *immediate*. About seventy-five verbs connote individual voluntary simple haste, including *scurry*, *bustle*, *fret*, *cut and run*, *make oneself scarce*, *whip*, *lash*, *bundle off*. There are a few adverbs,



A page from the Longman edition of Roget, published by Penguin, 1998

FUN

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**In countless groups
of words there are
not two but three
shades of sense—
the meaning, its
opposite, and a
middle ground.
The nature of the
middle-ground
word is variable.**

such as *feverishly, on the spur of the moment, with not a moment to lose*, and a very few interjections—*Buck up! Quick march! At the double!*

Within any one paragraph the words are grouped according to the manner and context in which they are used—whether, for example, they are usually employed in colloquial or in formal circumstances. Roget persuaded Longman to allow him to organize the book's Heads into two columns, with words of opposite meaning across from each other. So set against Haste is (no, not Less Speed; there is precious little wit in *Roget*) Leisure. Among those arrayed against *over-hasty* is *deliberate* (though with no phonetic explanation to guard against the verb). Against *expedite* is, among others, *while away*.

In formulating this dual-column plan, however, Roget very promptly came up against a problem that has long plagued semanticists interested in synonymy and antonymy: in countless groups there are in fact not two but three shades of sense—the meaning, its opposite, and a middle ground. *Beginning, middle, and end* are one obvious example; *past, present, and future* are another. And the more the nature of the middle-ground word is subject to scrutiny, the more it changes. In some trinities noted by Roget in his introduction, the central word is the opposite of both the others—*concavity, flatness, convexity*, for example, or *desire, indifference, aversion*. In some groups the middle word is the standard against which the others are measured: *sufficiency* exists between *insufficiency* and *redundance*.

To rub in the difficulty of trying to make semantic order out of English linguistic mayhem, what about groups in which the middle word represents an imperfect state of the other two? *Dimsightedness* is less perfect than both *vision* and *blindness*. *Semitransparency* is a less perfect state than either *transparency* or its opposite, *opacity*. To take this a little further: *damp* is neither *wet* nor *dry*, *tepid* is neither *hot* nor *cold*—and neither of these last two middle words has a precise opposite.

So should there have been three columns in Roget's book? Roget originally thought so, but he eventually recognized the practical difficulties and the cost of such an arrangement, to which his publisher was hostile. The plan was dropped. But in and of themselves, such difficulties with the internal classifications of synonymy need not have made *Roget* the force for literary ill that I believe it to be. If anything, those difficulties served to remind people interested in the vocabulary what a superbly complex entity the English language is. They served further to enhance public respect for the language, and to emphasize still more widely the great care that needed to be employed to ensure its best use.

No, the central shortcoming in *Roget's Thesaurus*, as I see it, stems not from the book's troublesome structure but from something quite different—from Peter Mark Roget's Panglossian regard for the intellectual merit of his likely readership. Roget never imagined, for instance, that an Ohio sophomore majoring in political science might one day use his book to find a word with which to pad out a paragraph in a midterm paper. Roget never envisioned that paperback editions of his work would be stuffed into millions of school backpacks and satchels from Huddersfield to Hobart, or that a barely literate board chairman bound for Liverpool would have his secretary's volume by his side as he was writing his report to shareholders on the morning express from Euston.

Roget assumed, as he organized his work, that anyone who might chance upon it would be just as clever as he, just as accustomed to precise syntax, to scrupulous grammar, and to confident and impeccable word selection. Armed with this naive set of assumptions, he produced a book that was predicated on the misguided belief that, as he wrote in his introduction, users would guide themselves through the thicket of words by relying on what he grandly termed their "instinctive tact." Thus there was no need to

explain what any word meant—because his users, with all their “tact,” would know that full well already.

And so an icily precise classification was all that was necessary. Definitions would be so cumbersome to include, so time-consuming to assemble, so costly to publish, so unnecessary, so—so *insulting* to his highly accomplished readers. Thus, crucially, Roget, who already possessed a deep knowledge of the English vocabulary, decided not to include them. And yet, of course, neither the Ohio sophomore nor the Liverpoolian businessman had such knowledge. Neither had the ability to make proper use of the volume Roget created. For such as these, the *Roget* that they were persuaded to buy and to use—wrongheadedly and irresponsibly, in my view—provided no more than an unexplained and inexplicable list of *quick fixes*. Each user had a sudden want. Each needed a word. Each reached for the *Roget*—and presto! The way the book is arranged makes it all appear easy, a quick solution in an efficient microsecond. And yet, precisely because the users are ill-versed, and because the book makes utterly invalid assumptions about their knowledge, and offers no help at all in discovering what anything means, the word chosen with each *presto!* is often wrong. Sometimes very wrong. Often slightly wrong. And at the very least, frequently, curiously, and discordantly *off*. For example, a freshman student of mine, who admitted to using *Roget*, attempted to improve the phrase “his earthly fingers” by changing it to “his chthonic digits.”

Each time such a wrong is perpetrated by way of Peter Mark Roget, the language, as spoken, written, or read, becomes a little worse, a little more mediocre, and a measure more decayed, disarranged, and unlovely. And that, I suggest, is why all *Rogets* should be shunned.

Back in the 1850s only a few recognized the potential shortcomings of *Roget's Thesaurus*. One of them was Edwin P. Whipple, who wrote a perceptive essay in the 1854 issue of the *North American Review*. His bitingly amusing remarks (which do not dwell on the extraordinary assumptions Roget made about his customers) deserve to be quoted at length, which Emblen does.

We congratulate that large, respectable, inexpressive and unexpressed class of thinkers, who are continually complaining of the barrenness of their vocabulary as compared with the affluence of their ideas, on the appearance of Dr. Roget's volume. If it does nothing else, it will bring a popular theory of verbal expression to the test; and if that theory be correct, we count upon witnessing a mob of mute Miltons and Bacons, and speechless Chathams and Burkes, crowding and tramping into print. Dr. Roget, for a moderate fee, prescribes the verbal medicine which will relieve the congestion of their thoughts. All the tools and implements employed by all the poets and philosophers of England can be obtained at his shop. The idea being given, he guarantees in every case to supply the word ... Indeed, if the apt use of words be a mechanical exercise, we cannot doubt that this immense mass of the raw material of expression will be rapidly manufactured into history, philosophy, poetry, and eloquence.

Seriously, we consider this book as one of the best of a numerous class, whose aim is to secure the results without imposing the tasks of labor, to arrive at ends by a dexterous dodging of means, to accelerate the tongue without accelerating the faculties. It is an outside remedy for an inward defect. In our opinion, the work mistakes the whole process by which living thought makes its way into living words, and it might be thoroughly mastered without conveying any real power or facility of expression.

A reference book of this nature and with this express purpose, Whipple continued, was certain to spread the contagion of literary mediocrity. What was



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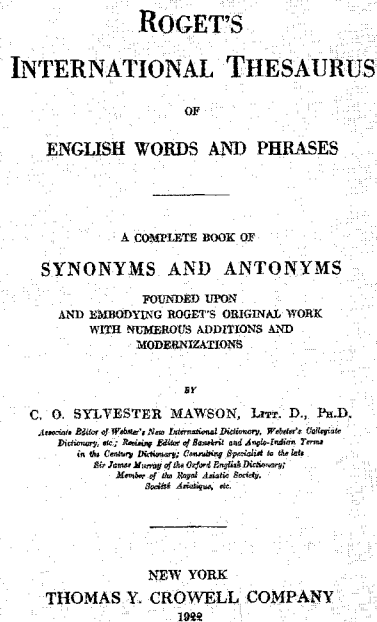
needed was not *more information* (oh! how today's users of the Internet might consider that anew) but *more inspiration*. Not more words to make easy the *expression* of ideas but more energy to make more probable the *conception* of ideas. Not so much message, not so much medium—but more, many more, marvels of true creation.

And Roget, Whipple implied, never had an original thought in his life. He was a mere classifier of the existing order, a pedant, a noble dullard who should no more have been let loose on the language than a civil engineer should be let loose on the west door of Chartres, or an industrial chemist on the manufacture of Haut-Brion. Whipple, amused and appalled, saw Roget as a man devoid of poetry, a sufferer from a “fluent debility,”

which never stumbles into ideas nor stutters into passion, which calls its commonplace comprehensiveness, and styles its sedate languor repose, would, if put upon a short allowance of words, and compelled to purchase language at the expense of conquering obstacles, be likely to evince some spasms of genuine expression; but it is hardly reasonable to expect this verbal abstemiousness at a period when the whole wealth of the English tongue is placed at the disposal of the puniest whisperers of rhetoric,—when the art of writing is avowedly taught on the principle of imitating the “best models,”—when words are worked into the ears of the young in the hope that something will be found answering to them in their brains,—and when Dr. Peter Mark Roget, who never happened on a verbal felicity or uttered a “thought-executing” word in the course of his long and useful life, rushes about, book in hand, to tempt unthinking and unimpassioned mediocrity into the delusion, that its disconnected glimpses of truths never fairly grasped, and its faint movements of embryo aspirations which never broke their shell, can be worded by his specifics into creative thought and passion.

Whatever the carping and the cavils, Roget and his publishers swiftly realized that their creation was a gold mine. The first edition of the *Thesaurus*, bound octavo, sold out its initial printing of a thousand copies by the end of the year. A second edition came out the following March, and a third—“cheaper ... enlarged ... improved”—went on the streets bound duodecimo in February of 1855. This edition—for which Roget rewrote part of the text and added “many thousand” new expressions and subsidiary headings that in his view filled gaps in the original structure—was used as the basis for so many subsequent printings that the steel-and-antimony plates were eventually worn smooth and useless.

The first American edition (1854) was edited by a man named Barnas Sears and published by Gould and Lincoln, of Boston. Roget conceived an immediate dislike for it, writing that “an imperfect edition of this work was published at Boston ... in which the editor, among other mutilations, has altogether omitted the Phrases ... and has removed from the body of the work all the words and expressions borrowed from a foreign language, throwing them into an Appendix, where ... they are completely lost to the inquirer.” He would perhaps have been more pleased when the distinctly different International Edition was published in New York, in 1922, by Thomas Crowell (which had bought the rights to the book in 1886 and had published for the next three and a half decades what was essentially a facsimile of the original, despite its being manifestly designed for the English-speakers of England). The rationale behind the International Edition was abundantly clear. As C. O. Sylvester Mawson wrote in his preface to Crowell's *Roget's International Thesaurus*, “The English language marches with no frontiers; it is a world possession.” So we find words and expressions that were much



"A world possession": the International Edition of Roget, 1922

joy give bold uonpsay think
model absurd sausage original shimmer young film
soon fiery glorious are an art & try
picture form metal dazzle live icon symbol
why a see life am

passion

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Roget toward the end of his life

better known on the Continent than in either America or Britain. Under the heading for Haste and Leisure, for instance, we find *brusquerie* and its Latin converse, *otium cum dignitate*. (In the newest, fifth edition of the *International*, published by HarperCollins in 1992, both these obscure forms have vanished, though the Latin term that was under the Leisure column has been replaced by the Italian *dolce far niente*, which is amply supplemented by the phrases *ride the gravy train* and *lead the life of Riley*.)

Roget's son, John, took over the *Thesaurus* when Roget died, at ninety, in 1869. John was more than modest about his own achievements (his only other publication was "A History of the Society of Water-Colourists," in 1891) and insisted that any changes he made to the great book during what was to be thirty-nine years of work (up until his death, in 1908) were "almost entirely of a practical nature, demanding industry and attention, rather than philosophic culture or the learning of a philologist."

John Roget did, however, engineer one important organizational compromise during his tenure: he extended his father's embryonic system of cross-referencing and fine-tuned it over the years, greatly simplifying a work that was in danger of collapsing under its own weight because of the rapid proliferation of words. (We like to think that our time is producing an uncountable welter of new words; but in comparing the mere 45,000 English words recognized by the last editions of Samuel Johnson's dictionary, published in the 1860s, with the 414,825 listed in the first edition of the *OED*, published in 1928, one can perhaps understand the pressure under which thesaurus compilers of the time were compelled to work.)

As the editions thundered out, the new words included in them—*electrolier*, *lorry*, *motor-car*, *veldt*, and *outspan* were all added under John Roget's suzerainty—reflected new technologies and the war in Natal and Cape Province. When *television* was added, it was put into the class of concepts that is termed Intellect—the exercise of the mind. (Sour minds might wonder at the propriety of classifying one of the senses of *television* under Intellect, particularly if they see on the screen such puzzling phenomena as Jerry Springer, Dan Rather, and Ron Popeil's Pocket Fisherman.)

Peter Mark Roget's primary intent in creating his book was a noble one—avowedly Platonic, Aristotelian, a monument to the Almighty and His purpose. Or at least it was until the very last minute, when Roget decided to include a feature he had earlier intended to forget—a feature that changed for all time the role that this remarkable book would play: an index.

When the index was finished, it was a miserly thing—hastily done, fully advertising the reluctance of its compiler. But because it made the book much easier to use—though in a way very different from what Roget had intended—it was to swell mightily over the coming years. John Roget worked hard to increase the size and scope of the index. Today the index to the British edition is twenty pages longer than the thesaurus itself. The index to *Roget's International Thesaurus*, in America, though set in a typeface two points smaller than that of the main body of the book, still occupies half the number of pages the thesaurus does; it would be far longer were it printed in the same size.

The index is and always has been what everybody uses. The classification system is something of which almost no user of *Roget* is even vaguely aware. I defy all but the specialists among readers of this article to claim that they knew, for example, that *deodorant*, *henpecked*, *box-office*, and *consuetude* can be found in a class Roget called Volition, or that *dog collar*, *privet*, *fulcrum*, and *clotheshorse* are in the class he called Space. However noble Roget's design, no one uses it and few care about it; if there was once a Platonic ideal for his book, it is subordinate to the relentless usefulness that was brought about, at a stroke, by the

inclusion of the index. As Roget might well have grumbled, that index represents the chicane that separates the original intent of the book from its present vulgar function.

This brings us again to the last of the three introductory questions: What have Roget and others in fact achieved? All the thesauri, word finders, and lexicons that compete for our attention and for hundreds of millions of dollars each year on the reference shelves and the back-to-school tables at Borders and Barnes & Noble have much to answer for. Some are crude devices for advancing lexical laziness; some offer amusing and intelligent ways of examining the marvels of the language. None has the biblical authority of *Roget*, however—which is why, though they merit brief consideration here, none will receive the withering blast that I think should be directed at the primary culprit. *Roget* may be a rogue; the others are just the naughty boys of the school yard, the hangers-on, the keepers of bad company.

There are many types, and there have been many experiments. An initial distinction should be drawn between conceptually arranged thesauri, of which *Roget* is the obvious example, and those—like the *American Century Thesaurus*, from Time Warner, and the *Oxford Paperback Thesaurus*, “in Clear A–Z Form with Most Useful Words First”—that have no truck with concept but are arranged wholly alphabetically. The relative benefits of alphabetical books can be fairly easily demonstrated—by seeing which words are included and which are not. Conceptual arrangements permit looking-up only in the index, and the indexes are not necessarily updated as frequently as are the word lists themselves; a new word may well be slipped hurriedly into the body of the book and left there as a serendipitous surprise.

Laurence Urdang, who founded the journal *Verbatim* and who has written or edited more than 120 dictionaries of various kinds, including the 1966 *Random House Dictionary of the English Language—Unabridged Edition* (he is currently working on a dictionary of historical nautical terms), has been responsible for various word finders, some high-minded, some pleasingly silly. His company, Verbatim Books, in 1982 published *Word for Word*, by Edward C. Pinkerton, one of the more serious (but far from solemn). It offers extraordinary chapters (with numbered lines, so complex a book is it) that show the links between seemingly unrelated words. The flap-copy tease is the relationship of *armadillo*, *arthritis*, *harmony*, *reason*, and *rituals*, all of which have some connection to the Indo-European root *ar-*, which means “to fit together.” (On a more frivolous level, Urdang’s alter ego, the suspiciously anagrammatic Claurène duGran, who is reputed to have “studied linguistics at Oxford and drama at Cambridge,” put out into the world twenty years ago a book called *Wordmanship*, which offered the linguistically insecure a raft of suggested synonyms to make their daily lives richer and more impressive. She recommended using *accipitrine* for *hawklike*, *discommode* for *inconvenience*, and *depilate* for *shave*. The noun form of the third has in the past two decades indeed made its way into the language of Madison Avenue.) Urdang also gave us the *Dictionary of Differences* (1988), which offered an alphabetically arranged list of useful but easily confused words, concepts, and fancies: *incredible* and *incredulous*, *baking powder* and *baking soda*, and the pentarchy *iamb*, *trochee*, *spondee*, *dactyl*, and *anapaest*.

Urdang is thus in a good position to have favorites among the better-known thesauri, and one of them is Francis March’s huge, out-of-print *Thesaurus Dictionary: A Treasure House of Words and Knowledge* (1903). White-bearded and benign, photographed for the book’s frontispiece seemingly floating in an ocean of scholarly paperwork, March presides over the instructions to the reader. His aim was that of all the other thesaurus makers—though not so noble, of

The facetious book *Wordmanship* (1981) offers a raft of synonyms to make daily life more impressive. It recommends using *accipitrine* for *hawklike* and *depilate* for *shave*.



In terms of fostering the proper use of English, March's thesaurus was in truth a very good one, for precisely the reason that *Roget*, which fosters showy mediocrity by offering no information, is a bad one.

course, as Roget's ideal. He hoped that his method would help users "definitely express a given idea."

March's thesaurus contains a vast alphabetical list ranging from *A-1* to *zymotic*. For each word—and, crucially, after the word's *definition*—it offers one or more pairs of words representing the range within which the particular word is used: for example, *A-1* is given the range *goodness-badness*. The reader may turn to this recommended pair of words in the alphabetical list and come upon an immense secondary list of several hundred nouns, verbs, and adjectives, all with definitions, that offer synonyms and antonyms to *A-1*. *Beneficence*, *bijou*, *value*, and *virtue* on one hand; *depravity*, *malevolence*, *peccancy*, and *pestilence* on the other. And each of these words, too, has a definition.

But March's thesaurus requires work. One must make an informed selection from among the vitally important series of definitions offered in the range within which a word might be used. Regrettably, the demanding nature of the task seems to have ended publication of this unusual and rather wonderful book after little more than twenty years of life. Yet in terms of fostering the proper use of English, March's was in truth a very good thesaurus, for precisely the reason that *Roget*, which fosters showy mediocrity by offering no information, is a bad one. March suggested a range and then forced the reader to make a choice. Roget presented a list and said, essentially, *pick a word, any word*. March simply asked too much of the reader: in the matter of words, making choices calls for both a modicum of intelligence and a time-consuming process of thought.

Let us say you want to use *Roget* to find a word that means "habit" (relating not to the convent but to the ashtray or the essence of juniper). After looking up *habit* in the index, you find the above-mentioned *consuetude*; but as to what precisely *consuetude* means, the book is silent. Unless you take care to consult a proper dictionary, you have no idea whether it is suitable for your purpose. You are dimly aware only of its range of use, and of other words that share that range—*cacoëthes*, for example, surely one of the ugliest words ever made. No thesaurus except March's will tell you what on earth this word means either, of course. March's will tell you very fully: it will tell you that the word means "a bad habit" and that it lies in the usage range of *habit-desuetude*, and it will also inform you of the phrase *cacoëthes scribendi*, meaning an unbearable and indescribable itch to write—the itch, perhaps, that has compelled me to get this far along without summing up why I think *Roget* is, in the literary universe, such a serious force for bad.

Thesauri came about in the first place in response to the desire of men and women of society to speak and write more fluently; the immediate popularity of these books, like that of Robert Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall*, arose from that ambition. Some of them proved helpful; Piozzi's, unfashionably prescriptive though it was, suggested ways in which words might be used, and in doing so gave the language a nudge in the direction of improvement. The flowery barbarisms of inkhorn terms vanished within years of the appearance of her book—no cause and effect established, but the possibility observed.

Roget, however, was not intended to address the want of drawing-room conversation; it met a very different set of needs. The book's real popularity was achieved—and sales figures more than amply confirm this—in the immediate aftermath of one fateful Sunday in December of 1913. That was the day that the popular newspaper the *New York World* published in its supplement *Fun* a small matrix of black and white squares into which readers were directed to write words that, in some clever way, correctly responded to a list of clues printed alongside the matrix. The crossword puzzle had been born.

By the 1920s the craze had spread across America and across the Atlantic; by

DESIGN



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The real popularity of *Roget* was achieved in the aftermath of the fateful Sunday in December of 1913 when the *New York World* published the first crossword puzzle.

1930 the venerable *Times* of London had a puzzle, the speed of completing which was used as a test of ability and intelligence. The provost of Eton, it was said, finished this exercise each morning in the time it took to boil his egg (from cold).

But there were, especially in Britain, strict and unspoken rules. Self-respecting people figuring out the answers to clever crossword puzzles never, ever used dictionaries—or any other reference books. To do so was an admission of defeat. It was simply not done.

Because many of these early crossword puzzles offered monetary rewards, a goodly number of stupid, callow, competitive, and greedy people did not observe these proprieties. They had a pressing need—to gain standing, to win dollars or pounds, to best the fellow next door. They yearned for a tool for looking up unknown words: a book that listed words that were similar to other words, so that if the clue was “habit,” they might find the answer in a list that stretched from *cacoëthes* and *consuetude* to *disposition*, *leaning*, and *mannerism*. Thesauri answered the call. Scores of them were on sale—the 1920s equivalent of the 935 thesauri listed for sale by Amazon eight decades later. And the king of the hill even then was *Roget*.

Roget's Thesaurus, which had come into being as a linguistic example of the Platonic ideal, became instead a vade mecum for the crossword cheat.

It already had other, more insidious shortcomings. By eschewing definitions altogether, and thus suggesting no choices, it fostered poor writing. It offered facile answers to complex linguistic questions. It appealed to a growing desire for snap solutions to tricky verbal situations. It enabled students to appear learned without ever helping to make them so. It encouraged a malaprop society. It made for literary window dressing. It was meretricious.

But a tool for cutting corners? How Peter Mark Roget might have turned in his grave: the book by which he set so much store, his most lasting memorial, was being used for petty and degrading purposes—assisting no one with the language, but boosting the circulation of tabloid dross. And its usage has not widened significantly since (not, that is, in the sense of becoming more than a quick and easy remedy for the lexically distressed—for the literary poseur, if you will). A student in want of a word? No need to expend mental energy, no need to wait until blood prickles from the forehead: *Roget* will supply the answer, will find the syllables to plug the hole, will offer the solution with no delay or fuss. No need to bend, spindle, or mutilate.

I thought when I began this that I might telephone or write a representative few writers, to ask if they used *Roget* to any measurable degree. I wondered if I might drop a line to John Updike, or Saul Bellow; I wondered about those writers who obviously have exceptional vocabulary control: Richard Ford, Anthony Lane, Tom Wolfe, Calvin Trillin. Or William F. Buckley, surely the writer with the greatest store of words. I thought about Robert Lowell, Anthony Burgess, Julian Barnes. I imagined lyricists—Cole Porter, Tom Lehrer. I thought first about the translator of the Norwegian Nobel Prize-winner Knut Hamsun, and second about the most recent translator of Dostoevski. Did any of these refer to *Roget*? Would any of them admit it? And what would be their overall view of this century-and-a-half-old book? Did they find it inspiring? Irritating? Do they use a thesaurus as much as they do a dictionary? A phone book?

In the end I neither called nor wrote—because I knew the answer to be obvious. Everyone has the book. Occasionally one makes use of it. But one never, never relies on it to help with the making of good writing. It may be used once in a while, to jog the memory, to unstick a synaptic moment. But it should never be trawled through or mined; its offerings should never be taken and transfused into a paragraph as relief for emptiness of thought.

Whatever merit all these paragraphs may have as writing, it seems appropriate to mention that *Roget* was not once employed in the selection of *les mots justes*. Such words as these paragraphs contain came, as they should do for all writers, from within—from memory, experience, conversation, reading, imperfectly recalled strands of knowledge.

And anyway—it is not simply by richness of word supply that a great or even a good writer makes a mark. It is by the acuity with which he or she uses the words that mind and passion have placed at the ready. It is the brave employment of the words that one already knows that makes the writing fine or no. And no increase in their numbers will do very much to improve the temper or the temperature or the pace if mind and heart and argument and passion are wanting. An engineer faced with the challenge of working on the west door of Chartres would do no better if he had more equipment: perhaps, in fact, he would ruin the greatness there more quickly, would more efficiently reduce it to something utterly without inspiration or art.

Consider, in conclusion, two simple passages, both drawn from the first chapter of Sir Ernest Gower's *The Complete Plain Words* (1954), a British-government-issued book that is still the Bible of the best English writing. The first is from a Shakespearean sonnet that begins, "Full many a glorious morning have I seen / Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye," and continues, as Gower cites, "Kissing with golden face the meadows green / Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy."

There was no *Roget* when Shakespeare wrote those lines—or, for that matter, any dictionary. The lines were written perhaps a decade before Robert Cawdrey and his *Table Alphabeticall*, 250 years before Peter Mark Roget and his high lexical ideals. And yet the writing is perfect, in choice and arrangement of words, in thought, timbre, address, and note.

As, on altogether another level, is this—a notice that was once placed inside all British post offices: "Postmasters are neither bound to give change nor authorised to demand it."

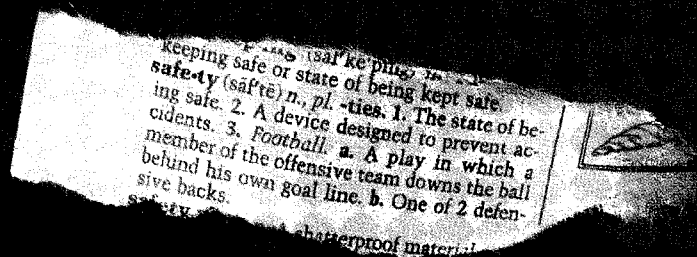
No *Roget* was employed here, either. The civil servant who penned those words knew just what he wanted to say, and had a mind lithe and educated enough to come up with a sentence in which every word counts, not one is superfluous, and the whole has a harmony that in its modest way achieves the greatness of poetry.

So, indeed, Peter Mark Roget, physician, chess genius, expert on bees, phrenology, and the kaleidoscope: for all your noble ideals and Aristotelian logic, your book offers comfort only to the few—some clues for crossword cheats, some natterings for speechwriters, and some quick and easy solutions for the making of the middlebrow, the mindless, and the mundane. *Roget* has become no more than a calculator for the lexically lazy: used too often, relied on at all, it will cause the most valuable part of the brain to atrophy, the core of human expression to wither.

To make us think a little more, to make us wonder a little longer, might it not now be for the best for your book simply to vanish, and for the name that is at the root of the eponym to be banished from the lexicon for all time? Perhaps the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is right to give you only twenty lines. Perhaps Microsoft has the meet and proper solution: to help render *Roget* into a nonword once again, and let the memory of the man and his creation fade, so that we can clamber back to a plainer, simpler world, where dictionaries and encyclopedias alone are set to guide us, and where our literary powers are born not out of banal and mediocre suggestion, not out of lexical shopping lists, but out of passion, thought, and intensity of feeling. ▀

**It is not simply by
richness of word
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There was no *Roget*
in Shakespeare's time.**





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THE HUNTER'S WIFE

A short story

BY ANTHONY DOERR

.....

It was the hunter's first time outside Montana. He woke, stricken still with the hours-old vision of ascending through rose-lit cumulus, of houses and barns like specks deep in the snowed-in valleys, all the scrolling country below looking December—brown and black hills streaked with snow, flashes of iced-over lakes, the long braids of a river gleaming at the bottom of a canyon. Above the wing the sky had deepened to a blue so pure he knew it would bring tears to his eyes if he looked long enough.

Now it was dark. The airplane descended over Chicago, its galaxy of electric lights, the vast neighborhoods coming clearer as the plane glided toward the airport—streetlights, headlights, stacks of buildings, ice rinks, a truck turning at a stoplight, scraps of snow atop a warehouse and winking antennae on faraway hills, finally the long converging parallels of blue runway lights, and they were down.

He walked into the airport, past the banks of monitors. Already he felt as if he'd lost something, some beautiful perspective, some lovely dream fallen away. He had come to Chicago to see his wife, whom he had not seen in twenty years. She was there to perform her magic for a higher-up at the state university. Even universities, apparently, were interested in what she could do. Outside the terminal the sky was thick and gray and hurried by wind. Snow was coming. A woman from the university met him and escorted him to her Jeep. He kept his gaze out the window.

They were in the car for forty-five minutes, passing first the tall, lighted architecture of downtown, then naked suburban oaks, heaps of ploughed snow, gas stations, power towers, and telephone wires. The woman said, "So you regularly attend your wife's performances?"

"No," he said. "Never before."

She parked in the driveway of an elaborate modern mansion, with square balconies suspended over two garages, huge triangular windows in the façade, sleek columns, domed lights, a steep shale roof.

Inside the front door about thirty nametags were laid out on a table. His wife was not there yet. No one, apparently, was there yet. He found his tag and pinned it to his sweater. A silent girl in a tuxedo appeared and disappeared with his coat.

The granite foyer was backed with a grand staircase, which spread wide at the bottom and tapered at the top. A woman came down. She stopped four or five steps from the bottom and said, "Hello, Anne" to the woman who had driven him there and "You must be Mr. Dumas" to him. He took her hand, a pale, bony thing, weightless, like a featherless bird.

Her husband, the university's chancellor, was just knotting his bow tie, she said, and she laughed sadly to herself, as if bow ties were something she disapproved of. The hunter moved to a window, shifted aside the curtain, and peered out.

In the poor light he could see a wooden deck the length of the house, angled and stepped, its width ever changing, with a low rail. Beyond it, in the blue shadows, a small pond lay encircled by hedges, with a marble birdbath at its center. Behind the pond stood leafless trees—oaks, maples, a sycamore as white as bone. A helicopter shuttled past, its green light winking.

"It's snowing," he said.

"Is it?" the hostess asked, with an air of concern, perhaps false. It was impossible to tell what was sincere and what was not. The woman who had driven him there had moved to the bar, where she cradled a drink and stared into the carpet.

He let the curtain fall back. The chancellor came down the staircase. Other guests fluttered in. A man in gray corduroy, with "Bruce Maples" on his nametag, approached him. "Mr. Dumas," he said, "your wife isn't here yet?"

"You know her?" the hunter asked. "Oh, no," Maples said, and shook his head. "No, I don't." He spread his legs and swiveled his hips as if stretching before a footrace. "But I've read about her."

The hunter watched as a tall, remarkably thin man stepped through the front door. Hollows behind his jaw and beneath his eyes made him appear ancient and skeletal—as if he were visiting from some other, leaner world. The chancellor approached the thin man, embraced him, and held him for a moment.

"That's President O'Brien," Maples said. "A famous man, actually, to people who follow those sorts of things. So terrible, what happened to his family." Maples stabbed the ice in his drink with his straw.

For the first time the hunter began to think he should not have come.

"Have you read your wife's books?" Maples asked.

The hunter nodded.

"In her poems her husband is a hunter."

"I guide hunters." He was looking out the window to where snow was settling on the hedges.

"Does that ever bother you?"

"What?"

"Killing animals. For a living, I mean."

The hunter watched snowflakes disappear as they touched the window. Was that what hunting meant to people? Killing animals? He put his fingers to the glass. "No," he said. "It doesn't bother me."

The hunter met his wife in Great Falls, Montana, in the winter of 1972. That winter arrived all at once—you could watch it come. Twin curtains of white appeared in the north, white all the way to the sky, driving south like the end of all things. Cattle galloped the fence-lines, bawling. Trees toppled; a barn roof tumbled over the highway. The river changed directions. The wind flung thrushes screaming into the gorse and impaled them on the thorns in grotesque attitudes.

She was a magician's assistant, beautiful, fifteen years old, an orphan. It was not a new story: a glittery red dress, long legs, a traveling magic show performing in the meeting hall at the Central Christian Church. The hunter had been walking past with an armful of groceries when the wind stopped him in his tracks and drove him into the alley behind the church. He had never felt such wind; it had him pinned. His face was pressed against a low window, and through it he could see the show. The magician was a small man in a dirty blue cape. Above him a sagging banner read THE GREAT VESPUCCI. But the hunter watched only the girl; she was graceful, young, smiling. Like a wrestler, the wind held him against the window.

The magician was buckling the girl into a plywood coffin, which was painted garishly with red and blue bolts of lightning. Her neck and head stuck out at one end, her ankles and feet at the other. She beamed; no one had ever before smiled so broadly at being locked into a coffin. The magician started up an electric saw and brought it noisily down through the center of the box, sawing her in half. Then he wheeled her apart, her legs going one way, her torso another. Her neck fell back, her smile faded, her eyes showed only white. The lights dimmed. A child screamed. Wiggle your toes, the magician ordered, flourishing his magic wand, and she did; her disembodied toes wiggled in glittery high-heeled pumps. The audience squealed with delight.

The hunter watched her pink, fine-boned face, her hanging hair, her outstretched throat. Her eyes caught the spotlight. Was she looking at him? Did she see his face pressed against the window, the wind slashing at his neck,

the groceries—onions, a sack of flour—tumbled to the ground around his feet?

She was beautiful to him in a way that nothing else had ever been beautiful. Snow blew down his collar and drifted around his boots. After some time the magician rejoined the severed box halves, unfastened the buckles, and fluted his wand, and she was whole again. She climbed out of the box and curtsied in her glittering dress. She smiled as if it were the Resurrection itself.

Then the storm brought down a pine tree in front of the courthouse, and the power winked out, streetlight by streetlight. Before she could move, before the ushers could begin escorting the crowd out with flashlights, the hunter was slinking into the hall, making for the stage, calling for her.

He was thirty years old, twice her age. She smiled at him, leaned over from the dais in the red glow of the emergency exit lights, and shook her head. "Show's over," she said. In his pickup he trailed the magician's van through the blizzard to her next show, a library fundraiser in Butte. The next night he followed her to Missoula. He rushed to the stage after each performance. "Just eat dinner with me," he'd plead. "Just tell me your name." It was hunting by persistence. She said yes in Bozeman. Her name was plain, Mary Roberts. They had rhubarb pie in a hotel restaurant.

"I know how you do it," he said. "The feet in the box are dummies. You hold your legs against your chest and wiggle the dummy feet with a string."

She laughed. "Is that what you do? Follow a girl from town to town to tell her her magic isn't real?"

"No," he said. "I hunt."

"And when you're not hunting?"

"I dream about hunting."

She laughed again. "It's not funny," he said.

"You're right," she said, and smiled. "It's not funny. I'm that way with magic. I dream about it. Even when I'm not asleep."

He looked into his plate, thrilled. He searched for something he might say. They ate.

"But I dream bigger dreams, you know," she said afterward, after she had eaten two pieces of pie, carefully, with a spoon. Her voice was quiet and serious. "I have magic inside of me. I'm not going to get sawed in half by Tony Vespucci all my life."

"I don't doubt it," the hunter said.

"I knew you'd believe me," she said.

But the next winter Vespucci brought her back to Great Falls and sawed her in half in the same plywood coffin. And the winter after that. Both times, after the performance, the hunter took her to the Bitterroot Diner, where he watched her eat two pieces of pie. The watching was his favorite part: a hitch in her throat as she swallowed, the way the spoon slid cleanly out from her lips, the way her hair fell over her ear.

Then she was eighteen, and after pie she let him drive her to his cabin, forty miles from Great Falls, up the Missouri and then east into the Smith River valley. She brought only a small vinyl purse. The truck skidded and sheered as he steered it over the unploughed roads, fishtailing in the deep snow, but she didn't seem afraid or worried about where he might be taking her, about the possibility that the truck might sink in a drift, that she might freeze to death in her pea coat and glittery magician's-assistant dress. Her breath plumed out in front of her. It was twenty degrees below zero. Soon the roads would be snowed over, impassable until spring.

At his one-room cabin, with furs and old rifles on the walls, he unbolted the door to the crawl space and showed her his winter hoard: a hundred smoked trout, plucked pheasants and venison quarters hanging frozen from hooks. "Enough for two of me," he said. She scanned his books over the fireplace—a monograph on grouse habits, a series of journals on upland game birds, a thick tome titled simply *Bear*. "Are you tired?" he asked. "Would you like to see something?" He gave her a snowsuit, strapped her boots into a pair of leather snowshoes, and took her to hear the grizzly. She wasn't bad on snowshoes, a little clumsy. They went creaking over wind-scalloped snow in the nearly unbearable cold.

The bear denned every winter in the same hollow cedar, the top of which had been shorn off by a storm. Black, three-fingered, and huge, in the starlight it resembled a skeletal hand thrust up from the ground, a ghoulish visitor scrabbling its way out of the underworld. They knelt. Above them the stars were knife points, hard and white. "Put your ear here," he whispered. The breath that carried his words crystallized and blew away. They listened, face-to-face, their ears over woodpecker holes in the trunk. She heard it after a minute, tuning her ears in to something like a drowsy sigh, a long exhalation of slumber. Her eyes widened. A full minute passed. She heard it again.

"We can see him," he whispered, "but we have to be dead quiet. Grizzlies are light hibernators. Sometimes all you do is step on twigs outside their dens and they're up."

He began to dig at the snow. She stood back, her mouth open, eyes wide. Bent at the waist, the hunter bailed the snow back through his legs. He dug down three feet and then encountered a smooth, icy crust covering a large hole in the base of the tree. Gently he dislodged plates of ice and lifted them aside. From the hole the smell of bear came to her, like wet dog, like wild mushrooms. The hunter removed some leaves. Beneath was a shaggy flank, a patch of brown fur.

"He's on his back," the hunter whispered. "This is his belly. His forelegs must be up here somewhere." He pointed to a place higher on the trunk.

She put one hand on his shoulder and knelt in the snow beside the den. Her eyes were wide and unblinking. Her jaw hung open. Above her shoulder a star separated itself from a galaxy and melted through the sky. "I want to touch



him," she said. Her voice sounded loud and out of place in that wood, under the naked cedars.

"Hush," he whispered. He shook his head no.

"Just for a minute."

"No," he hissed. "You're crazy." He tugged at her arm. She removed the mitten from her other hand with her teeth and reached down. He pulled at her again but lost his footing and fell back, clutching an empty mitten. As he watched, horrified, she turned and placed both hands, spread-fingered, in the thick shag of the bear's chest. Then she lowered her face, as if drinking from the snowy hollow, and pressed her lips to the bear's chest. Her entire head was inside the tree. She felt the soft silver tips of fur brush her cheeks. Against her nose one huge rib flexed slightly. She heard the lungs fill and then empty. She heard blood slug through veins.

"Want to know what he dreams?" she asked. Her voice echoed up through the tree and poured from the shorn ends of its hollowed branches. The hunter took his knife from his coat. "Summer," her voice echoed. "Blackberries. Trout. Dredging his flanks across river pebbles."

"I'd have liked," she said later, back in the cabin as he built up the fire, "to crawl all the way down there with him. Get into his arms. I'd grab him by the ears and kiss him on the eyes."

The hunter watched the fire, the flames cutting and sawing, each log a burning bridge. Three years he had waited for this. Three years he had dreamed this girl by his fire. But somehow it had ended up different from what he had imagined. He had thought it would be like a hunt—like waiting hours beside a wallow with his rifle barrel on his pack to see the huge antlered head of a bull elk loom up

against the sky, to hear the whole herd behind him inhale and then scatter down the hill. If you had your opening you shot and walked the animal down and that was it. But this felt different. It was exactly as if he were still three years younger, stopped outside the Central Christian Church and driven against a low window by the wind or some other, greater force.

"Stay with me," he whispered to her, to the fire. "Stay the winter."

Bruce Maples stood beside him, jabbing the ice in his drink with his straw. "I'm in athletics," he offered. "I run the athletic department here."

"You mentioned that."

"Did I? I don't remember. I used to coach track. Hurdles."

The hunter was watching the thin, stricken man, President O'Brien, as he stood in the corner of the reception room. Every few minutes a couple of guests made their way to him and took O'Brien's hands in their own.

"You probably know," the hunter told Maples, "that wolves are hurdlers. Sometimes the people who track them will come to a snag and the prints will disappear. As if the entire pack just leaped into a tree and vanished. Eventually they'll find the tracks again, thirty or forty feet away. People used to think it was magic—flying wolves. But all they did was jump. One great coordinated leap."

Maples was looking around the room. "Huh," he said. "I wouldn't know about that."

THE COIN BEHIND YOUR EAR

Before you knew you owned it
it was gone, stolen, and you were a fool.
How you never felt it is the wonder,
heavy and thick,
lodged deep in your hair like a burr.
You still see the smile of the magician
as he turned the coin in his long fingers,
which had so disturbed your ear
with their caress. You watched him
lift it into the light, bright as frost,
and slip it into his maze of pockets.
You felt vainly behind your ear
but there was no second coin,
nothing to tempt him back.
No one cared to know why he did it,
only how.

—CONNIE WANER

She stayed. The first time they made love, she shouted so loudly that coyotes climbed onto the roof and howled down the chimney. He rolled off her, sweating. The coyotes coughed and chuckled all night, like children chattering in the yard, and he had nightmares. "Last night you had three dreams, and you dreamed you were a wolf each time," she whispered. "You were mad with hunger and running under the moon."

Had he dreamed that? He couldn't remember. Maybe he talked in his sleep.

In December it never got warmer than fifteen below. The river froze—something he'd never seen. On Christmas Eve he drove all the way to Helena to buy her figure skates. In the morning they wrapped themselves head-to-toe in furs and went out to skate the river. She held him by the hips and they glided through the blue dawn, skating up the frozen coils and shoals, beneath the leafless alders and cottonwoods, only the bare tips of creek willows showing above the snow. Ahead of them vast white stretches of river faded into darkness.

In a wind-polished bend they came upon a dead heron, frozen by its ankles into the ice. It had tried to hack itself out, hammering with its beak first at the ice entombing its feet and then at its own thin and scaly legs. When it finally died, it died upright, wings folded back, beak parted in some final, desperate cry, legs like twin reeds rooted in the ice.

She fell to her knees beside the bird. In its eye she saw her face flatly reflected. "It's dead," the hunter said. "Come on. You'll freeze too."

"No," she said. She slipped off her mitten and closed the heron's beak in her fist. Almost immediately her eyes rolled back in her head. "Oh, wow," she moaned. "I can *feel* her." She stayed like that for whole minutes, the hunter standing over her, feeling the cold come up his legs, afraid to touch her as she knelt before the bird. Her hand turned white and then blue in the wind. Finally she stood. "We have to bury it," she said.

That night she lay stiff and would not sleep. "It was just a bird," he said, unsure of what was bothering her but bothered by it himself. "We can't do anything for a dead bird. It was good that we buried it, but tomorrow something will find it and dig it out."

She turned to him. Her eyes were wide. He remembered how they had looked when she put her hands on the bear. "When I touched her," she said, "I saw where she went."

"What?"

"I saw where she went when she died. She was on the shore of a lake with other herons, a hundred others, all facing the same direction, and they were wading among stones. It was dawn, and they watched the sun come up over the trees on the other side of the lake. I saw it as clearly as if I were there."

He rolled onto his back and watched shadows shift across the ceiling. "Winter is getting to you," he said. He resolved

to make sure she went out every day. It was something he'd long believed: go out every day in winter, or your mind will slip. Every winter the paper was full of stories about ranchers' wives, snowed in and crazed with cabin fever, who had dispatched their husbands with cleavers or awls.

Winter threw itself at the cabin. He took her out every day. He showed her a thousand ladybugs hibernating in an orange ball hung in a riverbank hollow; a pair of dormant frogs buried in frozen mud, their blood crystallized until spring. He pried a globe of honeybees from its hive, slow-buzzing, stunned from the sudden exposure, tightly packed around the queen, each bee shimmying for warmth. When he placed the globe in her hands, she fainted, her eyes rolled back. Lying there, she saw all their dreams at once, the winter reveries of scores of worker bees, each one fiercely vivid: bright trails through thorns to a clutch of wild roses, honey tidily brimming a hundred combs.

With each day she learned more about what she could do. She felt a foreign and keen sensitivity bubbling in her blood, as if a seed planted long ago were just now sprouting. The larger the animal, the more powerfully it could shake her. The recently dead were virtual mines of visions, casting them off with a slow-fading strength as if cutting a long series of tethers one by one. She pulled off her mittens and touched everything she could: bats, salamanders, a cardinal chick tumbled from its nest, still warm. Ten hibernating garter snakes coiled beneath a rock, eyelids sealed, tongues stilled. Each time she touched a frozen insect, a slumbering amphibian, anything just dead, her eyes rolled back and its visions, its heaven, went shivering through her body.

Their first winter passed like that. When he looked out the cabin window, he saw wolf tracks crossing the river, owls hunting from the trees, six feet of snow like a quilt ready to be thrown off. She saw burrowed dreamers nestled under roots against the long twilight, their dreams rippling into the sky like auroras.

With love still lodged in his heart like a splinter, he married her in the first muds of spring.

Bruce Maples gasped when the hunter's wife finally arrived. She moved through the door like a show horse, demure in the way she kept her eyes down, but assured in her step; she brought each tapered heel down and struck it against the granite. The hunter had not seen his wife for twenty years, and she had changed—become refined, less wild, and somehow, to the hunter, worse for it. Her face had wrinkled around the eyes, and she moved as if avoiding contact with anything near her, as if the hall table or the closet door might suddenly lunge forward to snatch at her lapels. She wore no jewelry, no wedding ring, only a plain black suit, double-breasted.

She found her nametag on the table and pinned it to her lapel. Everyone in the reception room looked at her and then

looked away. The hunter realized that she, not President O'Brien, was the guest of honor. In a sense they were courting her. This was their way, the chancellor's way—a silent bartender, tuxedoed coat girls, big icy drinks. Give her pie, the hunter thought. Rhubarb pie. Show her a sleeping grizzly.

They sat for dinner at a narrow and very long table, fifteen or so high-backed chairs down each side and one at each end. The hunter was seated several places away from his wife. She looked over at him finally, a look of recognition, of warmth, and then looked away again. He must have seemed old to her—he must always have seemed old to her. She did not look at him again.

The kitchen staff, in starched whites, brought onion soup, scampi, poached salmon. Around the hunter guests spoke in half whispers about people he did not know. He kept his eyes on the windows and the blowing snow beyond.

The river thawed and drove huge saucers of ice toward the Missouri. The hunter felt that old stirring, that quickening in his soul, and would rise in the wide pink dawns, grab his fly rod, and hurry down to the river. Already trout were rising through the chill brown water to take the first insects of spring. Soon the telephone in the cabin was ringing with calls from clients, and his guiding season was on.

In April an occasional client wanted a mountain lion or a trip with dogs for birds, but late spring and summer were for trout. He was out every morning before dawn, driving with a thermos of coffee to pick up a lawyer, a widower, a politician with a penchant for wild cutthroat. He came home stinking of fish guts and woke her with eager stories—native trout leaping fifteen-foot cataracts, a stubborn rainbow wedged under a snag.

By June she was bored and lonely. She wandered through the forest, but never very far. The summer woods were dense and busy, not like the quiet graveyard feel of winter. Nothing slept for very long; everything was emerging from cocoons, winging about, buzzing, multiplying, having litters, gaining weight. Bear cubs splashed in the river. Chicks screamed for worms. She longed for the stillness of winter, the long slumber, the bare sky, the bone-on-bone sound of bull elk knocking their antlers against trees.

In September the big-game hunters came. Each client wanted something different: elk, antelope, a bull moose, a doe. They wanted to see grizzlies, track a wolverine, shoot sandhill cranes. They wanted the heads of seven-by-seven royal bulls for their dens. Every few days he came home smelling of blood, with stories of stupid clients, of the Texan who sat, wheezing, too out of shape to get to the top of a hill for his shot. A bloodthirsty New Yorker claimed he wanted only to photograph black bears; then he pulled a pistol from his boot and fired wildly at two cubs and their mother. Nightly she scrubbed blood out of the hunter's coveralls, watched it fade from rust to red to rose in a basin filled with river water.

She began to sleep, taking long afternoon naps, three hours or more. Sleep, she learned, was a skill like any other, like getting sawed in half and reassembled, or like divining visions from a dead robin. She taught herself to sleep despite heat, despite noise. Insects flung themselves at the screens, hornets sped down the chimney, the sun angled hot and urgent through the southern windows; still she slept. When he came home each autumn night, exhausted, forearms stained with blood, she was hours into sleep. Outside, the wind was already stripping leaves from the cottonwoods—too soon, he thought. He'd take her sleeping hand. Both of them lived in the grip of forces they had no control over—the October wind, the revolutions of the earth.

That winter was the worst he could remember: from Thanksgiving on they were snowed in, the truck buried under six-foot drifts. The phone line went down in December and stayed down until April. January began with a chinook followed by a terrible freeze. The next morning a three-inch crust of ice covered the snow. On the ranches to the south cattle crashed through and bled to death kicking their way out. Deer punched through with their tiny hooves and suffocated in the deep snow beneath. Trails of blood veined the hills.

In the mornings he would find coyote tracks written in the snow around the door to the crawl space, two inches of hardwood between them and all his winter hoard hanging frozen beneath the floorboards. He reinforced the door with baking sheets, nailing them up against the wood and over the hinges. Twice he woke to the sound of claws scrabbling against the metal and charged outside to shout the coyotes away.

Everywhere he looked something was dying: an elk keeling over, an emaciated doe clattering onto ice like a drunken skeleton. The radio reported huge cattle losses on the southern ranches. Each night he dreamt of wolves, of running with them, soaring over fences and tearing into the steaming carcasses of cattle.

In February he woke to coyotes under the cabin. He grabbed his bow and knife and dashed out into the snow barefoot, his feet going numb. They had gone in under the door, chewing and digging the frozen earth under the foundation. He unbolted what was left of the door and swung it free.

Elk arrows were all he had, aluminum shafts tipped with broadheads. He squatted in the dark entrance—their only exit—with his bow at full draw and an arrow nocked. Above him he could hear his wife's feet pad quietly over the floorboards. A coyote made a coughing sound. Others shifted and panted. Maybe there were ten. He began to fire arrows steadily into the dark. He heard some bite into the foundation blocks at the back of the crawl space, others sink into flesh. He spent his whole quiver: a dozen arrows. The yelps of speared coyotes went up. A few charged him, and he

lashed at them with his knife. He felt teeth go to the bone of his arm, felt hot breath on his cheeks. He lashed with his knife at ribs, tails, skulls. His muscles screamed. The coyotes were in a frenzy. Blood bloomed from his wrist, his thigh.

She heard the otherworldly screams of wounded coyotes come up through the floorboards, his grunts and curses as he fought. It sounded as if an exit had been tunneled all the way from hell to open under their house, and what was now pouring out was the worst violence that place could send up. She knelt in front of the fireplace and felt the souls of coyotes as they came through the boards on their way skyward.

He was blood-soaked and hungry, and his thigh had been badly bitten, but he worked all day digging out the truck. If he did not get food, they would starve, and he tried to hold the thought of the truck in his mind. He lugged slate and tree bark to wedge under the tires, excavated a mountain of snow from the truck bed. Finally, after dark, he got the engine turned over and ramped the truck up onto the frozen, wind-crusting snow. For a brief, wonderful moment he had it careening over the icy crust, starlight washing through the windows, tires spinning, pistons churning, what looked to be the road unspooling in the headlights. Then he crashed through. Slowly, painfully, he began digging it out again.

It was hopeless. He would get it up, and then it would break through a few miles later. Hardly anywhere was the sheet of ice atop the snow thick enough to support the truck's weight. For twenty hours he dug and then revved and slid the truck over eight-foot drifts. Three more times it crashed through and sank to the windows. Finally he left it. He was ten miles from home, thirty miles from town.

He made a weak and smoky fire with cut boughs and lay beside it and tried to sleep, but he couldn't. The heat from the fire melted snow, and trickles ran slowly toward him but froze solid before they reached him. The stars twisting in their constellations above had never seemed farther or colder. In a state that was neither fully sleep nor fully waking, he watched wolves lope around his fire, just outside the reaches of light, slaving and lean. He thought for the first time that he might die if he did not get warmer. He managed to kneel and turn and crawl for home. Around him he could feel the wolves, smell blood on them, hear their nailed feet scrape across the ice.

He traveled all that night and all the next day, near catatonia, sometimes on his feet, more often on his elbows and knees. At times he thought he was a wolf, and at times he thought he was dead. When he finally made it to the cabin, there were no tracks on the porch, no sign that she had gone out. The crawl-space door was still flung open, and shreds of the siding and the doorframe lay scattered about.

She was kneeling on the floor, ice in her hair, lost in some kind of hypothermic torpor. With his last dregs of en-

ergy he constructed a fire and poured a mug of hot water down her throat. As he fell into sleep, he watched himself as from a distance, weeping and clutching his near-frozen wife.

They had only flour and a few crackers in the cupboards. When she could speak, her voice was quiet and far away. "I have dreamt the most amazing things," she murmured. "I have seen the places where coyotes go when they are gone. I know where spiders go, and geese ..."

Snow fell incessantly. Night was abiding; daylight passed in a breath. The hunter was beyond hungry. Whenever he stood up, his eyesight fled in slow, nauseating streaks of color. He went out with lanterns to fish, shoveled down to the river ice, chopped through it with a maul, and shivered over the hole jigging a ball of dough on a hook. Sometimes he brought back a trout; other times they ate a squirrel, a hare, once a famished deer whose bones he cracked and boiled, or only a few handfuls of rose hips. In the worst parts of March he dug out cattails to peel and steam the tubers.

She hardly ate, sleeping eighteen, twenty hours a day. When she woke, it was to scribble on notebook paper before plummeting back into sleep, clutching at the blankets as if they gave her sustenance. There was, she was learning, strength hidden at the center of weakness, ground at the bottom of the deepest pit. With her stomach empty and her body quieted, without the daily demands of living, she felt she was making important discoveries. She was only nineteen and had lost twenty pounds since marrying him. Naked, she was all rib cage and pelvis.

He read her scribbled dreams, but they seemed to be senseless poems and gave him no clues to her.

Snail: sleds down stones in the rain.

Owl: fixes his eyes on hare, drops as if from the moon.

Horse: rides across the plains with his brothers ...

In April the temperature rose above zero and then above twenty. He strapped an extra battery to his pack and went to dig out the truck. Its excavation took all day. He drove it slowly back up the slushy road in the moonlight and asked if she'd like to go to town the next morning. To his surprise, she said yes. They heated water for baths and dressed in clothes they hadn't worn in six months. She threaded twine through her belt loops to keep her trousers up.

Behind the wheel his chest filled to have her with him, to be moving out into the country, to see the sun above the trees. Spring was coming; the valley was dressing up. Look there, he wanted to say, those geese streaming over the road. The valley lives. Even after a winter like that.

She asked him to drop her off at the library. He bought food—a dozen frozen pizzas, potatoes, eggs, carrots. He nearly wept at seeing bananas. In the parking lot he drank a half gallon of milk. When he picked her up at the library, she had applied for a library card and borrowed twenty



books. They stopped at the Bitterroot for hamburgers and rhubarb pie. She ate three pieces. He watched her eat, the spoon sliding out of her mouth. This was better. This was more like his dreams.

"Well, Mary," he said, "I think we made it."

"I love pie," she said.

As soon as the line was repaired, the phone began to ring. He took his fishing clients down the river. She sat on the porch, reading, reading.

Soon her sudden and ravenous appetite for books could not be met by the Great Falls Public Library. She wanted other books—essays about sorcery, primers on magic-working and conjury that had to be mail-ordered from New Hampshire, New Orleans, even Italy. Once a week the hunter drove to town to collect a parcel of books from the post office: *Arcana Mundi*, *The Seer's Dictionary*, *Paragon of Wizardry*, *Occult Science Among the Ancients*. He opened one to a random page and read "Bring water, tie a soft fillet around your altar, burn it on fresh twigs and frankincense ..."

She regained her health, took on energy, no longer lay under furs dreaming all day. She was out of bed before he was, brewing coffee, her nose already between pages. With a steady diet of meat and vegetables her body bloomed, her hair shone, her eyes and cheeks glowed. How beautiful she seemed to him in those few hours he was home. After supper he would watch her read in the firelight, blackbird feathers tied all through her hair, a heron's beak hanging between her breasts.

In November he took a Sunday off and they cross-country skied. They came across a bull elk frozen to death in a draw. Ravens shrieked at them as they skied to it. She

knelt and put her palm on the leathered skull. "There," she moaned. "I feel him."

"What do you feel?" he asked, standing behind her. "What is it?"

She stood, trembling. "I feel his life flowing out," she said. "I see where he goes, what he sees."

"But that's impossible," he said. "It's like saying you know what I dream."

"I do," she said. "You dream about wolves."

"But that elk's been dead at least a day. It doesn't go anywhere. It goes into the crops of those ravens."

How could she tell him? How could she ask him to understand such a thing? How could anyone understand? More clearly than ever she could see that there was a fine line between dreams and wakefulness, between living and dying, a line so tenuous it sometimes didn't exist. It was always clearest for her in winter. In winter, in that valley, life and death were not so different. The heart of a hibernating newt was frozen solid, but she could warm and wake it in her palm. For the newt there was no line at all, no fence, no River Styx, only an area between living and dying, like a snowfield between two lakes: a place where dreams and wakefulness met, where death was only a possibility and visions rose shimmering to the stars like smoke. All that was needed was a hand, the heat of a palm, the touch of fingers.

That February the sun shone during the days and ice formed at night—slick sheets glazing the wheat fields, the roofs and roads. One day he dropped her off at the library, the chains on the tires rattling as he pulled away, heading back up the Missouri toward Fort Benton.

Around noon Marlin Spokes, a snowplough driver the hunter knew from grade school, slid off the Sun River Bridge in his plough and dropped forty feet into the river. He was dead before they could get him out of the truck. She was reading in the library, a block away, and heard the plough crash into the riverbed like a thousand dropped girders. When she got to the bridge, sprinting in her jeans and T-shirt, men were already in the water—a telephone man from Helena, a jeweler, a butcher in his apron, all of them had scrambled down the banks and were wading in the rapids, prying the door open. The men lifted Marlin from the cab, stumbling as they carried him. Steam rose from their shoulders and from the crushed hood of the plough. She careened down the snow-covered slope and splashed to them. Her hand on the jeweler's arm, her leg against the butcher's leg, she reached for Marlin's ankle.

When her finger touched Marlin's body, her eyes rolled back and a single vision leaped to her: Marlin Spokes pedaling a bicycle, a child's seat mounted over the rear tire with a helmeted boy—Marlin's own son—strapped into it. Spangles of light drifted over the riders as they rolled down a lane beneath giant, sprawling maples. The boy reached for

Marlin's hair with one small fist. In the glass of a storefront window their reflection flashed past. Fallen leaves turned over in their wake. This quiet vision—like a ribbon of rich silk—ran out slowly and fluidly, with great power, and she shook beneath it. It was she who pedaled the bike. The boy's fingers pulled through her hair.

The men who were touching her or touching Marlin saw what she saw, felt what she felt. At first they spoke of it only in their basements, at night, but Great Falls was not a big town, and this was not something one could keep locked in a basement. Soon they discussed it everywhere—in the supermarket, at the gasoline pumps. People who didn't know Marlin Spokes or his son or the hunter's wife or any of the men in the river that morning soon spoke of the event like experts. "All you had to do was *touch* her," a barber said, "and you saw it too." "The most beautiful lane you've ever dreamed," a deli owner raved. "You didn't just pedal his son around," movie ushers whispered, "you *loved* him."

He could have heard anywhere. In the cabin he built up the fire, flipped idly through a stack of her books. He couldn't understand them—one of them wasn't even in English.

After dinner she took the plates to the sink.

"You read Spanish now?" he asked.

Her hands in the sink stilled. "It's Portuguese," she said. "I understand only a little."

He turned his fork in his hands. "Were you there when Marlin Spokes was killed?"

"I helped pull him out of the truck. I don't think I was much good."

He looked at the back of her head. He felt like driving his fork through the table. "What tricks did you play? Did you hypnotize people?"

Her shoulders tightened. Her voice came out furious. "Why can't you—" she began, but her voice fell off. "It wasn't tricks," she muttered. "I helped carry him."

When she started to get phone calls, he hung up on the callers. But they were relentless: a grieving widow, an orphan's lawyer, a reporter from the *Great Falls Tribune*. A blubbing father drove all the way to the cabin to beg her to come to the funeral parlor, and finally she went. The hunter insisted on driving her. It wasn't right, he declared, for her to go alone. He waited in the truck in the parking lot, engine rattling, radio moaning.

"I feel so alive," she said afterward, as he helped her into the cab. Her clothes were soaked through with sweat. "Like my blood is fizzing through my body." At home she lay awake, far away, all night.

She got called back and called back, and each time he drove her. He would take her after a whole day of duck hunting and pass out from exhaustion while he waited in the truck. When he woke, she would be beside him, holding his hand, her hair damp, her eyes wild. "You dreamt you

were with the wolves and eating salmon," she said. "They were washed up and dying on the shoals."

He drove them home over the dark fields. He tried to soften his voice. "What do you do in there? What really?"

"I give them solace. I let them say good-bye to their loved ones. I help them know something they'd never otherwise know."

"No," he said. "I mean what kind of tricks? How do you do it?"

She turned her hands palms up. "As long as they're touching me, they see what I see. Come in with me next time. Go in there and hold hands. Then you'll know."

He said nothing. The stars above the windshield seemed fixed in their places.

Families wanted to pay her; most wouldn't let her leave until they did. She would come out to the truck with fifty, a hundred—once four hundred—dollars folded into her pocket. She began to go off for weekends, disappearing in the truck before he was up, a fearless driver. She knelt by roadkill—a crumpled porcupine, a shattered deer. She pressed her palm to the truck's grille, where the husks of insects smoked. Seasons came and went. She was gone half the winter. Each of them was alone. They never spoke. On longer drives she was sometimes tempted to keep the truck pointed away and never return.

In the first thaws he would go out to the river and try to lose himself in the rhythm of casting, in the sound of pebbles driven downstream, clacking together. But even fishing had become lonely for him. Everything, it seemed, was out of his hands—his truck, his wife, the course of his own life.

As hunting season came on, his mind wandered. He was botching kills—getting upwind of elk, or telling a client to unload and call it quits thirty seconds before a pheasant burst from cover. When a client missed his mark and pegged an antelope in the neck, the hunter berated him for being careless, knelt over its tracks, and clutched at the bloody snow. "Do you understand what you've done?" he shouted. "How the arrow shaft will knock against the trees, how the animal will run and run, how the wolves will trot behind it to keep it from resting?"

The client was red-faced, huffing. "Wolves don't hunt here," the client said. "There haven't been wolves here for twenty years."

She was in Butte or Missoula when he discovered her money in a boot: six thousand dollars and change. He canceled his trips and stewed for two days, pacing the porch, sifting through her things, rehearsing his arguments. When she saw him, the sheaf of bills jutting from his shirt pocket, she stopped halfway to the door, her bag over her shoulder, her hair pulled back.

"It's not right," he said.

She walked past him into the cabin. "I'm helping peo-

ple. I'm doing what I love. Can't you see how good I feel afterward?"

"You take advantage of them. They're grieving, and you take their money."

"They *want* to pay me," she shrieked. "I help them see something they desperately want to see."

"It's a gift. A con."

She came back out on the porch. "No," she said. Her voice was quiet and strong. "This is real. As real as anything: the valley, the river, your trout hanging in the crawl space. I have a talent. A gift."

He snorted. "A gift for hocus-pocus. For swindling widows out of their savings." He lobbed the money into the yard. The wind caught the bills and scattered them over the snow.

She hit him, once, hard across the mouth. "How dare you?" she cried. "You, of all people, should understand. You who dreams of wolves every night."

In the months that followed, she left the cabin more frequently and for longer durations, visiting homes, accident sites, and funeral parlors all over central Montana. Finally she pointed the truck south and didn't turn back. They had been married five years.

Twenty years later, in the Bitterroot Diner, he looked up at the ceiling-mounted television and there she was, being interviewed. She lived in Manhattan, had traveled the world, had written two books. She was in demand all over the country.

"Do you commune with the dead?" the interviewer asked.

"No," she said. "I help people. I commune with the living. I give people peace."

"Well," the interviewer said, turning to speak into the camera, "I believe it."

The hunter bought her books at the bookstore and read them in one night. She had written poems about the valley, written them to the animals: you rampant coyote, you glorious buck. She had traveled to Sudan to touch the backbone of a fossilized stegosaur, and wrote of her frustration when she divined nothing from it. A TV network flew her to Kamchatka to embrace the huge, shaggy neck of a mammoth as it was air-lifted from a glacier. She'd had better luck with that one, describing an entire herd slogging big-footed through a slushy tide, tearing at sea grass and flaring their ears to catch the sun. In a handful of poems there were even vague allusions to him—a brooding, blood-soaked presence that hovered outside the margins like a storm on its way, like a killer hiding in the basement.

The hunter was fifty-eight years old. Twenty years was a long time. The valley had diminished slowly but perceptibly: roads came in, and the grizzlies left, seeking higher country. Loggers had thinned nearly every accessible stand of trees. Every spring runoff from logging roads turned the

river chocolate-brown, and the soil from the old forests was being washed into the Missouri. In his cabin, bent over the table, he set aside her books, took a pencil, and wrote her a letter.

A week later a Federal Express truck drove all the way to the cabin. Inside the envelope was her response, on embossed stationery. The handwriting was hurried and efficient. *I will be in Chicago, it said, day after tomorrow. Enclosed is a plane ticket. Feel free to come. Thank you for writing.*

After sherbet the chancellor called his guests into the reception room. Burning candles had been distributed around the room: on the sills, the banister, the mantel, the bookshelves. The bar had been taken down; in its place three caskets had been set on the carpet. A bit of snow that had fallen on the lids—they must have been kept outside—was melting, and drops ran onto the carpet, where they left dark circles. Around the caskets cushions had been placed on the floor. The hunter leaned against the entryway and watched guests drift uncomfortably into the room, some cradling coffee cups, others gulping at gin or vodka in deep tumblers. Eventually everyone settled on the floor in a circle.

The hunter's wife came in then, elegant in her dark suit. She knelt and motioned for O'Brien to sit beside her. His face was pinched and inscrutable. Again the hunter had the impression that he was not of this world but of a slightly leaner one.

"President O'Brien," his wife said, "I know this is difficult for you. Death can seem so final, like a blade dropped through the neck. But the nature of death is not at all final. It is not some dark cliff off which we leap. I hope to show you it is merely a fog, something we can peer into and out of, something we can know and face and not necessarily fear. By each life taken from our collective lives we are diminished. But even in death we have much to celebrate. It is only a transition, like so many others."

She moved into the circle and unfastened the lids of the caskets. From where he sat the hunter could not see inside. His wife's hands fluttered around her waist like birds. "Think," she said. "Think hard about something you would like resolved, some matter, gone now, in the grips of the past, which you wish you could take back—perhaps with your daughters, a moment, a lost feeling, a desperate wish."

The hunter closed his eyes. "Think now," his wife was saying, "of some wonderful moment, some fine and sunny minute you shared, your wife and daughters, all of you together." Her voice was lulling. Behind his eyelids the glow of the candles made an even orange wash. He knew her hands were reaching for whatever—whoever—lay in those caskets. Somewhere inside him he felt her extend across the room.

His wife said more about beauty and loss being the same thing, about how they ordered the world, and he felt something happening—a strange warmth, a flitting presence,

something dim and unsettling, like a feather brushed across the back of his neck. Hands on both sides of him reached for his hands. Fingers locked around his fingers. He wondered if she was hypnotizing him, but it didn't matter. He had nothing to fight off or snap out of. She was inside him now; she had reached across and was poking about.

Her voice faded, and he felt himself swept up as if rising toward the ceiling. Air washed lightly in and out of his lungs; warmth pulsed in the hands that held his. In his mind he saw a sea emerging from fog. The water was broad and flat and glittered like polished metal. He could feel dune grass moving against his shins, and wind coming over his shoulders. All around him bees shuttled over the dunes. Far out a shorebird was diving for crabs. He knew that a few hundred yards away two girls were building castles in the sand; he could hear their song, soft and lilting. Their mother was with them, reclining under an umbrella, one leg bent, the other straight. She was drinking iced tea, and he could taste it in his mouth, sweet and bitter with a trace of mint. Each cell in his body seemed to breathe. He became the girls, the diving bird, the shuttling bees; he was the mother of the girls and the father; he could feel himself flowing outward, richly dissolving, paddling into the world like the very first cell into the great blue sea ...

When he opened his eyes, he saw linen curtains, women in gowns kneeling. Tears were visible on many people's cheeks—O'Brien's and the chancellor's and Bruce Maples's. His wife's head was bowed. The hunter gently released the hands that held his, stood, and walked out into the kitchen, past the sudsy sinks, the stacks of dishes. He let himself out a side door and found himself on the wooden deck that ran the length of the house, a couple of inches of snow already settled on it.

He felt drawn toward the pond, the birdbath, the hedges. He walked to the pond and stood at its rim. The snow fell steadily, and the undersides of the clouds glowed with reflected light from the city.

Before long his wife stepped onto the deck and came down to join him. There were things he had been preparing to say: something about a final belief, an expression of gratitude for providing a reason to leave the valley, if only for a night. He wanted to tell her that although the wolves were gone, may always have been gone, they still came to him in dreams. That they could run there, fierce and unfettered, was surely enough. She would understand. She had understood long before he did.

But he was afraid to speak. He could see that speaking would be like dashing some very fragile bond to pieces, like kicking a dandelion gone to seed; the wispy, tenuous sphere of its body would scatter in the wind. So instead they stood together, the snow fluttering down from the clouds to melt into the water, where their reflected images trembled like two people trapped against the glass of a parallel world, and he reached, finally, to take her hand. ▀



INCIDENT REPORT *William Makepeace Thackeray and James T. Fields*

An ocean lay between them, spanned by the magnetism of similar minds. Without Fields's urging, Thackeray might never have ventured so far as America—and not once but twice. When Fields's duties as the junior partner (and later the head) of the publishers Ticknor & Fields took him to London, the two were nearly inseparable. The gentle New Englander found Thackeray irrepressible: "Down on your knees, you rogue, for here *Vanity Fair* was penned!" the novelist ordered, striking a pose outside his Kensington abode. And on a Boston stroll his natural exuberance—a shout of joy here, a happy shuffle there—evoked stares.

Dinners marked by hilarity and good fellowship were the hallmark of Thackeray's visits, so it was not without apprehension that Fields invited Thackeray during his second Boston visit to a meeting of a scientific club. He knew that a prosy presentation on a dull topic was all too possible, and in fact that was exactly what occurred. Thackeray was instantly bored. His own speeches, which commanded high fees, seldom went beyond a few paragraphs delivered

with verve and charm. Now he rose quite deliberately from his prominent position and escaped into a small, dimly lit anteroom. Once there, visible to few except Fields, he became an exultant schoolboy just released from his lessons, inventing a pantomime of retaliation at his friend. With exaggerated gestures he threw an imaginary Fields to the floor and stabbed him repeatedly. Then, feigning doubt that his victim had expired, he drew an imaginary revolver and fired several times at his friend's supposed head. As the speaker droned on, Thackeray climaxed his drama by seizing a small vial lying on a mantelpiece and miming the scene from *Hamlet* in which one of the players, intending to represent Claudius, kills the king by pouring poison into his ear.

A few years later, as the editors of *Cornhill Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, respectively, Thackeray and Fields attended a festive dinner in London. Afterward Thackeray drove his friend home. In spite of the piercing cold, he escorted Fields to the door, sang a little verse that he knew Fields was fond of, and gave him "a gigantic embrace." Fields never saw him again. —NANCY CALDWELL SOREL

ONE SMART BOOKIE

He can't tell right from wrong

BY JACK EL-HAI

Photograph by Craig Perman

.....

MAX WEISBERG: See, I don't have the education other people have.

JUDGE: That's right, but you are better with numbers than I am.

WEISBERG: What?

JUDGE: But you are better with numbers than I am.

WEISBERG: Well, I try my best anyway. That is all I know, is numbers. I don't know the other stuff.

—Ramsey County, Minnesota,
District Court, April 19, 2000

On the morning of February 5, 1999, agents from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety invited themselves into Max Weisberg's house, on Iglehart Avenue in St. Paul, showed a search warrant, and began picking the place apart. They found cash everywhere, including \$7,028 in a garbage bag in a bedroom; \$2,000 in a dresser drawer; \$5,521 in the pockets of pants tossed across the dresser; \$10,930 in two grocery bags; and \$2,090 in a flannel jacket. They also discovered a skeleton key that opened a locked front-entry closet. The closet held an additional \$37,420. The agents hauled away the money, a total of \$126,989, along with notebooks containing gambling information, betting sheets, and scorebooks.

Weisberg, then seventy-five, did not read the receipt the agents left him. Written documents are difficult for him to understand. He cannot do his laundry or figure out his electric bill without help. One of the most celebrated sports bookmakers in the Midwest, he is mentally disabled, with an IQ that has at various times been measured in the mid-50s to the low 70s. Although Weisberg's speaking skills, as reflected in court records, appear roughly normal, he is not, in fact, an articulate speaker, and he has a sharply limited conversational range. But few people can approach Weisberg at calculating odds and handicapping games. A St. Paul pool-hall owner whose establishment regularly filled with bettors and bookies testified in court in 1990 that Weisberg has "probably the greatest gambling mind in the world."

Weisberg is a man with savant syndrome—"someone who has special abilities that stand in stark contrast to his overall handicap," according to Darold Treffert, a Wisconsin psychiatrist whose book *Extraordinary People* (2000) exam-

ines the cases of mentally disabled and autistic people with unusual talents. These savants, whose special abilities come in several varieties, usually excel in calendar calculating, music, art, or numerical ability. Weisberg is the only savant Treffert has ever heard of whose gift has run him afoul of the law. In repeated raids the police have seized betting records and about \$700,000 from Weisberg's house and safe-deposit boxes. Three times in 1989–1994 Weisberg faced felony charges of sports bookmaking. The first time he pleaded guilty and received five years' probation. Since then judges, a jury, psychologists, and psychiatrists have determined that Weisberg is not responsible for his actions because his mental disability prevents him from distinguishing between right and wrong.

Despite all the evidence of bookmaking seized in that 1999 raid, Weisberg faced no charges afterward. "It was a sure bet that we were going to lose if we charged him again," says Susan Gaertner, Ramsey County's chief prosecuting attorney. "He would obviously again raise a defense of mental disability. Based on his previous [psychological] examinations, I didn't see how to go against that." Law-enforcement agents feel similarly stymied. Norm Pint, a special agent at the Department of Public Safety, says that his agency will no longer target Weisberg. "The courts have spoken," Pint says. "It would be foolish for us to pursue any investigation" of him. Weisberg remains free, a bookmaker with a license to take bets.

LAWYER: Now, after they found that money, they found the money and took it from your house. Did they leave you at the house?

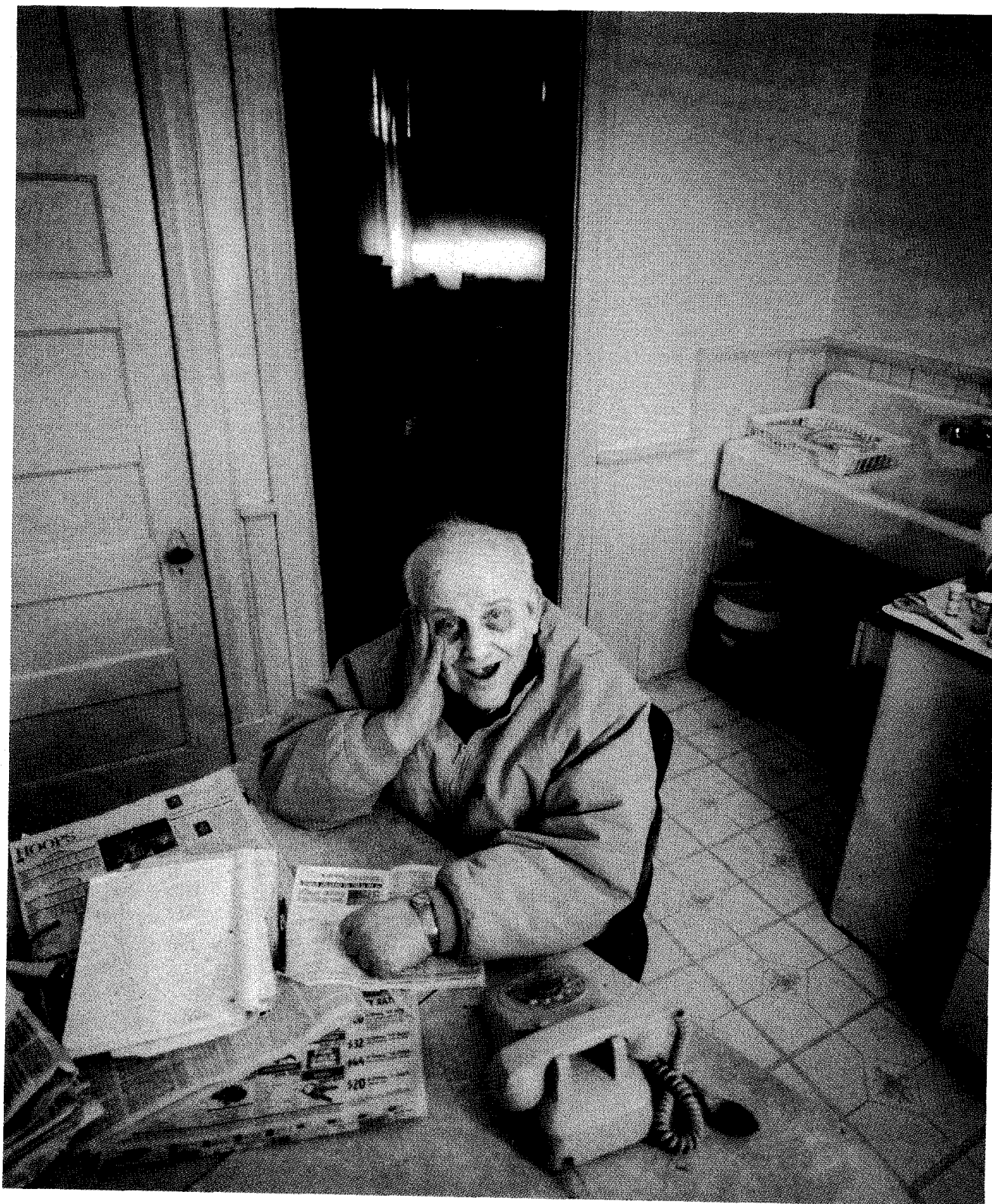
WEISBERG: Yes, they did.

LAWYER: What did you do next?

WEISBERG: What could I do? I ate my supper.

—Ramsey County District Court,
April 19, 2000

Weisberg lives in a corner-lot house that his parents bought half a century ago. He conducts his business in the kitchen, seated at a table that holds a TV set, usually tuned to a football or a basketball game; the day's sports pages; sheets of paper listing wagers in crooked columns; the remnants of meals past; and a bat-



tered telephone. The rest of the house is dark, even during the day, with only the glow of a space heater illuminating a bedroom. Bars cover the windows, and a stout two-by-four secures the back door. Most of the furnishings, decorations, and floor coverings remain as they were in the 1950s.

Ever since the death of his older brother, Solly, in 1998, Weisberg has lived here alone. "Solly was like my right

arm," he says, in the thick and moist voice that signals his mental disability. His blue eyes and sagging face are composed now when he remembers his brother, but the loss of Solly depressed Weisberg for months. That face, along with Weisberg's waddling gait and the baggy pants that puddle at his feet, are well known to anyone who has spent much time in Minnesota's capital city during the past six decades.

Weisberg began his working life in the 1930s, helping his father sell junk and vegetables door to door. Later he joined Solly in a newsstand at Seventh and Wabasha. Eventually Weisberg became a highly visible flower vendor whose stakeouts of prominent intersections and sales expeditions into bars earned him the nickname "Maxie Flowers." Everyone, from bankers to cops to politicians, bought flowers from Weisberg.

Flower selling proved a great cover for taking bets. Weisberg attended school only through the fourth grade, but the streets gave him an education in gambling. In St. Paul's saloons and alleys, which had provided a haven for such crooks as John Dillinger and Ma Barker, Weisberg absorbed the fine points of bookmaking. A successful bookie weighs a team's strengths and weaknesses, judges the home-field advantage, and senses the enthusiasm of bettors, all with the aim of "setting the line." The "line"—the Vikings over the Giants by four points, for example—establishes the point spread that the bookie believes will attract gamblers in equal numbers to each side of the bet. On this delicate balance, divined by psychological as well as mathematical art, the bookmaker's financial success hangs. Ron Rosenbaum is an attorney who frequently ran into Weisberg and other bookies in St. Paul pool halls in the 1960s. Back before Las Vegas odds makers supplied the whole country with computer-generated point spreads, Rosenbaum says, "Max was considered the best at setting the number." Working in his head, Weisberg could perform the calculations necessary to set odds on complex parlays and wagers based on the total number of points opposing teams would score.

Weisberg's slow speech becomes even more hesitant when he tries to explain how he arrives at his odds and point spreads. "I look at a line and find this game five to six points off," he says. "[Other bookmakers] are mad at me because I look at a line and don't see how the points they gave are right." He maintains that he works with only half a dozen customers now—guys whose bets he has taken for decades, and whose fondness for him allows them to forgive those occasions on which the legal forfeitures of money have kept him from paying off clients. "I don't want any more [customers]," he says. "I don't take any more."

Now Weisberg's legs are in a bad state, and he can no longer go out and sell flowers. He awaits calls from his customers with greater eagerness than ever. It's not that he likes sports—he doesn't. "I get tired of watching all those millionaire owners and players," he says. If he didn't have a financial stake in a game, "I wouldn't give a damn what they do."

JUDGE: Now, I want you to look me in the eyes, Mr. Weisberg, just so you understand and know this: Bookmaking is over unless you choose to go to prison for 15 months. I don't think that our prison system is a place for a sweet and nice man like yourself, but that's

where you will go. The first time you make book and you are brought into court, Mr. Weisberg, you are the person calling the shot as to where you will live for 15 months. It won't be me, it won't be anybody else, it will be yourself making that decision. Do you understand me, sir?

WEISBERG: Yes, I do.

—Ramsey County District Court,
November 16, 1989

In 1966 the police arrested Weisberg on suspicion of sports bookmaking, but the charge was dropped. Seven years later he served four months at Sandstone Federal Prison after he was arrested in a gambling raid, and he paid several hundred dollars in fines for two other gambling convictions. But his real adventures with the law began on December 4, 1988, when police officers made the first of many searches of Weisberg's house and safe-deposit boxes. Max and Solly lost \$437,000 that day—the most money seized in the St. Paul Police Department's history, according to the chief of police. Seven years later a judge divided the money among the city, the police, and Weisberg's lawyers.

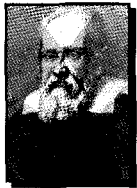
In June of 1989 Weisberg pleaded guilty to the bookmaking charge stemming from the previous year's raid. He was sentenced to five years' probation and a stayed fifteen-month prison term. The following year another police search turned up \$4,500 and more betting slips. This time Weisberg had a new lawyer, Ron Meshbesh, who requested a jury trial and developed a new defense strategy: documenting his client's mental retardation. He presented evidence that Weisberg had spent more than a year in a state institution for the retarded, where the staff measured his IQ at 55 and described his condition as "mental deficiency: moron, cause undiagnosed." Kenneth Perkins, a psychologist, testified that Weisberg's general reasoning and comprehension skills fell within the range of the mentally retarded. Meshbesh argued that Weisberg was incompetent to know right from wrong. He called Weisberg a Rain Man–like savant with a miraculous ability to make book. The jury found that Weisberg had indeed taken bets on sporting events, but it acquitted him of bookmaking on the grounds of mental deficiency. *Probably no other bookmaker in American legal history has been acquitted on those grounds.*

Despite the acquittal, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office used the jury's finding that Weisberg had made book as evidence that he had violated the terms of his probation. After a lower court agreed, Meshbesh took the matter to the Minnesota Court of Appeals, which determined that Weisberg had not violated his probation; but Weisberg had already served twenty days in the county workhouse, a sentence that District Court Judge Lawrence Cohen had shrewdly staggered to include the dates of the Super Bowl and the boys' state high school hockey and basketball tournaments. "There is no doubt in my mind that Max knew what he was doing, and that he knew it was wrong," says Cohen, who is now the

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Ever since the dawn of civilization, certain crucial questions have preoccupied thoughtful people:

What is the purpose of life? What is the best kind of life? Who or what is God? How can we tell truth from falsehood? What is the essence of justice? When is it legitimate for one person to have power over others? Can these questions even be answered?

You too must have asked yourself questions like these. Perhaps you once vowed that some day you would work your way through the works of the greatest thinkers and find your own answers.

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chief judge on the county bench. "And he tried to do it in a secretive way, which indicated it was wrong."

The county's continuing pursuit of an elderly and mentally disabled man outraged many in the Twin Cities, including Kenneth Perkins. Perkins had measured Weisberg's IQ in the low 70s but had found that Weisberg had remarkable numerical skills. "My position all along has been that Max was not competent or capable of understanding what was going on," Perkins says. "He firmly believed that he was doing absolutely nothing wrong. He believed that taking bets was just as legal as what goes on in Las Vegas or the Minnesota lottery." In Perkins's opinion, Weisberg should be left alone: "At what point do you get to harassing him? I don't feel he's hurting anybody, and considering who he is and his history, he's not a threat or a menace to society in any way."

All was then quiet until October of 1993, when the police returned to Weisberg's house and took away \$47,000 and the usual collection of betting slips and gambling records. Tried on bookmaking charges the following summer, Weisberg won another acquittal, this time from a district court judge. Meshbeshner says that when he was celebrating this latest finding of mental deficiency with his client in a tavern, he said, "Max, you are the only bookie in the United States who has a free pass."

Since then, despite the 1999 raid, Weisberg has not been charged with any crime. Although he acknowledges that much of the seized money came from gambling, he insists that he has done nothing wrong. "A bookmaker is someone who has thirty or fifty customers," he says. "I'm not bookmaking. I just want something going. If I turn the TV on, it gives me something to watch." Meshbeshner, who has now been representing Weisberg for twelve years, smiles at the mention of his client's name. "I love the guy," he says. "I've made a few bucks on him too."

"I don't think the law envisioned this," says Darold Trefert, the expert on savants. "It would need to be more creative to deal fairly with a circumstance like this."

LAWYER: What kinds of things do you not understand that other people do?

WEISBERG: What is that, ma'am?

LAWYER: You just said ... you don't understand those things that other people do. What do you mean?

WEISBERG: That means I try my best to do everything I can and some things I understand and some things I don't understand.

LAWYER: Okay. And are legal papers one thing that you have a hard time understanding?

WEISBERG: Yeah, right.

LAWYER: Okay.

WEISBERG: If you didn't have the education, you probably would be the same way.

—Ramsey County District Court,
April 19, 2000

People who knew Weisberg as a child recall a disheveled and awkward boy who habitually chewed on his shirt collar. "Maxie always failed," says Leon Frankel, a classmate of Weisberg's at Franklin Elementary School in St. Paul. "They kept him behind in school—he was kind of dull." Poorly equipped for book learning, Weisberg left school and hustled candy bars, peanuts, newspapers, or whatever he could sell to earn some money for his family. Weisberg's sister, Helen Finesilver, remembers, "He had a habit of running away from home. He would ride freight trains, and when he was good and ready he would come home."

In 1939 Weisberg, then fifteen, was committed to the Faribault School for the Feeble-Minded, a state institution in Faribault, Minnesota. For the next fifteen months he desperately wanted to get out. He says he was frightened by the staff's threats to sterilize him, and he escaped from the school. After that he stayed out of institutions, living with his parents and Solly, and he never even came close to marrying. "I didn't want nobody nagging me," he explains. Only since Solly's death has he lived alone.

Today Weisberg lives off his Social Security checks and the small sums he earns making book. He receives assistance and affection from an assortment of Good Samaritans, social workers, and friends who drive him around, clear his walk of snow, help him shop, and regularly check on him. "He can remember which sixteen teams are playing over the weekend, where they're playing, and the odds on each game, but he cannot remember my name," says Bettyann Pappenfus, a telecommunications analyst who for two years has volunteered to clean Weisberg's house and do his laundry.

In April of last year a Ramsey County judge presided over what may have been Weisberg's final court appearance. At issue was what should be done with the \$126,989 that the police had seized the year before from Weisberg's house. In the end \$51,687 went to the Internal Revenue Service and a similar amount went to his lawyers. But for once a little bit returned to Weisberg—at least indirectly. In a moment of compassion the judge ordered that nearly \$13,000 be spent to bring the electrical system of Weisberg's old house up to code and to add air-conditioners.

There he sits in the kitchen every day, dressed in layers, taking bets from his customers over the phone, and scrawling the wagers on yellow legal pads. His reputation for paying off is excellent—except after police raids. His payouts are fairer than the state lottery's. Most important to Weisberg, his honesty is rarely questioned. ("Sure, everything I say will be true, 'cause I always tell the truth," he once told a startled court clerk who was administering the oath.) For Weisberg, now seventy-seven, it is enough to run his business, live independently, and stay healthy. "My parents always told me, 'Your name is Weisberg, you can be a person with dignity,'" he says. ▀

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS *Lost and Found*

New York's Grand Central Terminal is the largest facility of its kind in the world. A train arrives at or departs from Grand Central every two minutes; every day half a million people pass through it. Once in a while one of them inadvertently leaves a little something behind.

If some unscrupulous person doesn't make off with it first, that little something is carried down to a small room tucked away in a remote corner of the terminal's lower level. In all, 15,000 items end up in Grand Central's Lost and Found every year. Last year 56 percent of them were recovered by their original owners. "Our goal is sixty percent," says Steve Hutcher, the manager of the Lost and Found. "The low-value items—keys, one glove, a hat, stuff that no one comes looking for—are what drives our numbers down. When I got here, two years ago, we had three whole tubs filled with keys."

Today they've got it down to one tub. They still have several tubs of hardcover books. There's also a tub of cellu-

lar phones and pagers, a tub of eyeglasses, a tub of gloves, and a tub or two of compact umbrellas.

The terminal gets its share of expensive items, too. One day a purse came in containing two pairs of socks. "When we checked it out, we discovered that each pair of socks had five thousand dollars rolled up in it," Hutcher says. The purse was quickly recovered. "We've had a couple of things from Tiffany's. And a ten-thousand-dollar fur coat. You'd be surprised—you actually get a lot of laptop computers. How could somebody leave behind something that valuable?"

And then there are the things that you would think passengers couldn't forget: prosthetic limbs, glass eyeballs, hairpieces, an urn containing a husband's ashes. "A huge, inflatable rubber raft," Hutcher says. "It's been here for two years."

Fred Chidester, who ran the Lost and Found before Hutcher, recalls, "A plastic surgeon once left two eyebrows and an earlobe." —RICHARD RUBIN



TECHNO-THRILLER

Now showing continuously at a theater near you

BY IAN FRAZIER

Illustration by Istvan Banyai

.....

Opening shot of the Mall in Washington, D.C., seen from above through an office window. Then the focus becomes blurry.

Sound of clicking keys on a computer keyboard.

KEYS: *Click-click-click-click-click. Click-click-click. Click-click-click-click-click-click-click-click-click-click.*

(Pause.)

KEYS: *Click-click-click-click. Click. Click.*

The shot moves from the blurry window across a desk to show fingers poised above the computer keyboard. Just the ends of the fingers, not the whole hand. The fingers hover, slightly trembling, indecisive.

Close-up of an almost full cup of coffee next to the computer.

KEYS: *Click-click-click. Click ... click ...*

Shot of the fingers moving over the keyboard. Extreme close-up of right index finger moving slowly, slowly, to the Enter key. It pauses above the Enter key for several seconds. Then it hits the key.

Burst of loud, suspenseful music. Sudden close-up shot of computer screen. Flashing, in greenish computer type on the screen, the words ILLEGAL OPERATION ILLEGAL OPERATION ILLEGAL OPERATION

An alarm sounds: *Wee-ooo wee-ooo wee-ooo wee-ooo ...*

Close-up of holes in the computer speaker the alarm is coming out of. Shot of fingers moving quickly on keyboard.

KEYS: *Click-click! Click-click-click! Click-click-click-click!*

Alarm stops.

Scene 2

Close-up of a satellite in outer space with Earth in the background. The satellite has radio dishes sticking out on both sides, antennae, robotic arms, etc.

Close-up of satellite's control panel. A red light on it is blinking. The red light stops blinking. After a few seconds a green light goes on.

Scene 3

Shot of same computer as before. Close-up of coffee cup. Now it is about half full.

KEYS: *Click-click-click-click-click-click-click-click.*

Close-up of computer screen. It is blank. Then moving geometric patterns appear on it, get smaller, and disappear. Again the screen is blank.

KEYS (confidently): *Click-click-click-click-click-click.*

More geometric patterns, but different ones this time. They move faster and vibrate excitedly and disappear. Then, with a tinkling three-note bell of welcome, the words ACCESSING DEFCON CODE FILES pop onto the screen. Close-up on these words until they're huge.

WHISPERED VOICE: *Bingo!*

Scene 4

Shot of microchip magnified 10,000 times. Sudden close-up of its circuitry. Burst of scary *whang-ang-ang-ang-ang* sound.

Scene 7

Shot of space station. It goes by the satellite of Scene 2. Close-up of satellite. Now many lights are flashing strangely on its control panel. One of its robotic arms begins to move.

Scene 12

Shot from an office window showing minarets, onion domes, and other foreign-looking tops of buildings.

Sound of clicking keys. These keys sound different—sharper, more sinister.

KEYS: *Cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck.*

Shot of keyboard, with fingers moving on it. They are long and slender, with manicured red fingernails.

Close-up of computer screen. Jingling tambourine-rattle of welcome as the words FILE ACCESS DEFCON CODING appear. Close-up on these words until they're huge.

WHISPERED VOICE: *Bh'hatvan!*

Scene 19

Shot of big room full of computers with nobody at them. Subtitle says THE PENTAGON. Shot goes unhurriedly along row after row of computer screens, all dark. After many



rows it passes a screen on which the words UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY are blinking over and over. It goes back for a close-up on that screen. Somewhere, softly and forebodingly, a military band begins to play.

Shot continues down rest of rows of blank computer screens.

Scene 26

Split-screen shot of keyboards. On left, keyboard from opening scene; on right, keyboard from Scene 12. Ordinary fingers and red-fingernail fingers typing.

KEYS (on left): *Click-click-click-click-click!*

KEYS (on right): *Cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck-cleck!*

Typing goes on getting faster, accompanied by tense music. Scene lasts about half an hour.

Scenes 30-45

Additional plot: shots of computer screens, fingers typing, frantic mouse-clicks, tidal wave, explosions, ringing phones, papers pouring from fax machine, beepers going off, etc.

Scene 51

Sudden terrifying shot of computer screen seen from below as if about to fall on you. Symbols flash rapidly across it as sound of typing and mouse-clicks becomes deafeningly loud. Nervous music rising.

Jarring full-screen shot of digital clock with glowing red numbers complete to the thousandth of a second. The numbers are moving, going backward to zero. The clock has about fifty-eight seconds on it.

Shot of fingers typing really fast.

KEYS: *Click'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick'ick!*

Alternating shots of clock running down and fingers typing. Music reaches crescendo.

Suddenly clock stops. There are eleven thousandths of a second left.

Scene 55

Shot of Harrison Ford and Julia Roberts embracing.

Scene 58

Shot of satellite. All its robotic arms are retracted. It is orbiting peacefully and looks fine.

Scene 60

Shot of fingers turning off computer. This takes several minutes because of the steps involved. Finally screen goes blank.

Extreme close-up of right index finger moving to turn off little yellow-green light in right-hand corner below computer screen. Tired but relieved, the finger pushes the button. Gradually, the light dims.

Triumphant music as the credits roll. ▀

PURSUIITS & RETREATS



ENTERTAINING

PUTTING GUESTS IN THEIR PLACE

Never mind the food. The essence of a good dinner party lies in seating everyone properly

BY MARY KILLEN

.....

I am not a boastful person. In fact, self-deprecation is generally judged to be one of my most winning attributes. I am always ready to discuss my personal defects—irritability, untidiness, permanent panel of blubber between bust and waist which can't be exercised away. But I am going to be boastful now as a social service.

The English magazine *The Spectator* employs me as "Dear Mary," a so-called

agony aunt, in which capacity I have over the years gained considerable expertise in various areas of etiquette; I like to think I have solved many nearly intractable social quandaries for readers. Furthermore, in my own social circle I have been told that there is one area of life enhancement at which I excel, and that it is only right for me to pass on my skills in this department to others.

Organizing the seating at lunch and

dinner parties is what, I frankly agree, I am good at. And this happens to be the biggest strategic difficulty faced by a host or hostess today: not what to cook or whether to use a caterer but—now that we're all so spoiled that good food isn't the treat it once was, and we want good social intercourse thrown in as well—how to use the seating plan to maximize everyone's enjoyment.

As a provincial Northern Irish-woman from a medical background catapulted, through marriage, into English and Scottish high society in the 1980s, I have been in a unique position to observe a range of quaint but effective customs surrounding the perennial social problem of placement, or *place à table*, as the grand French call it. I have

PAUL COX

viewed these customs with the clarity of observation and genuine interest that perhaps no one but an outsider could bring to the study of them. Incidentally, the English are a snobbish race, but only toward other Englishmen, of ranks different—both higher and lower—from their own. Everyone else they welcome with open minds, and so I was able to infiltrate.

It was very soon after I had been inducted into high society that I found I could marry my intuition and skill at gossip extraction to the centuries-old rules of seating. Not only could I assemble my own largish parties very effectively, but elsewhere my hostesses would often invite me to do it for them. I had some excellent opportunities to learn during five years of twenty-strong house parties held by the daughters of the Thane of Cawdor on the Drynahan estate, in Scotland. I saw how important it was to arrange seating bossily in advance. With spontaneous placement, people may find themselves opting to sit next to someone they feel guilty about. More likely it will be the person they were talking to when dinner was announced—someone with whom they have already exhausted all possible conversational topics. I extracted other useful tips, as well, from the world of the Scottish clan chieftains and the English dukes, who down the ages have needed to manipulate large numbers of people in civilized settings. Their experience can be of benefit to us all.

There are those who say that for the purpose of stimulating the best conversation, the ideal number of guests is six or eight and the table should be round. Naturally, one may wish to bring together more people than that, and the table in one's dining room may be of a different shape. In any case, the English custom—like the custom on the international diplomatic stage—is that the male host should sit in the chair farthest from the dining-room door, with the most "important" female guest on his right, and the hostess should sit opposite her husband. This tradition has its downside, as a duke's daughter once lamented to me. Her rank invariably decrees that she be placed "at the top

of the table on the right-hand side of the host, while all the interesting writers and artists are halfway down the table." She could escape the consequences of overprivilege, I suggested to her, simply by making a request in advance: "I may be slightly late, so please put me someplace where I can slip in without too much fuss."

But specifically who should sit next to whom? There is no question of seating a married couple next to each other in sophisticated circles. The glamorous and grand Susan Crewe, the editor of the British *House & Garden* magazine, who was raised in a stately home, put this rule in perspective by telling me, "We have a lovely family tradition that we observe on Christmas Day at my brother's house. There are usually thirty-four of us sitting down to lunch, and we always sit next to our husbands or wives, because that is the only time of the year that we ever get the chance to do so." There is even an old upper-class joke: "I had to marry her. It was the only way I could avoid having to sit next to her at dinner."

Susan Crewe had to eat in her nursery until she was thirteen. Then her mother allowed her to join the grown-ups in the dining room, under pain of being banished back to the nursery if she was caught not chatting first to the gentleman on her left and then, during the next course, to the gentleman on her right. "If you run out of things to say, ask them if they have a dog," her mother advised. "Whether the answer is yes or no, that's always good for at least five minutes' conversation."

When Crewe grew up and started to give her own dinner parties, she found a piece of advice imparted to her by Daniel Salem, a former European chairman of Condé Nast, especially useful. She reports that Salem insisted, "You must think of a table plan in two dimensions, not one, and remember to consider not just who is next to whom but also who is *opposite* whom, across the table." Salem had another fixed rule, Crewe told me: "Always put husbands and wives out of each other's earshot; otherwise they keep correcting each other's stories. When they're too near each other, it also stops flirt-

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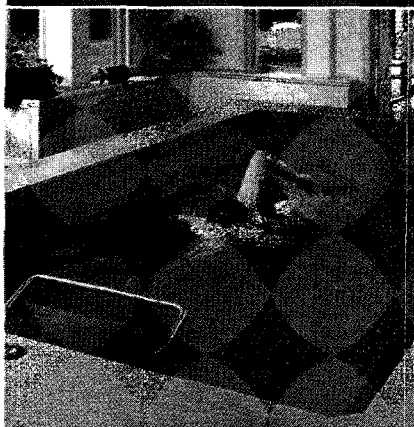


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ing, which is very important for the chemistry of a dinner party."

It is, of course, stuffy and pompous to want equal numbers of males and females. But, as I never tire of saying, even where it is highly unlikely that any romantic liaisons might spring up at your party, it is more fun if they are theoretically possible between those seated next to each other. Where the sexes are not evenly represented, gay people usually don't mind being seated between members of their own sex, and the same rules of flirting may apply.

Some people have the ambitious idea that they can maximize the networking potential of a dinner party by shuffling people around after the main course so that they sit between two new people for dessert and coffee. But this plan is fraught with pitfalls, because, like a law of physics, it is inevitable that one person will not turn up and the hosts will be forced to do yet more thankless, frantic rearranging than they'd otherwise need to.

Of course, seating everyone well is not the end of a host or hostess's obligations to the guests. The host will correctly kick off proceedings by talking to the woman on his right during the first course and the woman on his left during the second. His wife should do the reverse, and their guests should follow suit. Thus every woman turns first to her left and every man first to his right, rather like synchronized swimming. If, however, one person is unaware that this is the form, there can be a disruptive ripple effect around the table.

At royal dinners, so alert are the courtiers to the danger that someone may turn incorrectly that at the end of each course they shut off their conversation as though it were on tap, readying themselves to embark on fresh conversations with the people on their other sides. Lady Celestria Noel, the daughter of the Earl of Gainsborough, declares that because so many people are (as she is) "hopeless at knowing their left from their right," they should "watch the hostess—because she may get it wrong—before they start to talk, and then take their cue from her."

Should an elderly gentleman (elderly gentlemen are often the worst offend-

ers) give his full attention to the pretty girl on his left and ignore the old woman on his right, the host or hostess must correct the balance by finding an excuse to stare beadily into his eyes and break up his unsuitable attachment. "Just interrupt Cyril," the hostess might call down the table. "He knew Person X; he can tell us what X would have said." This having been done, group orchestration ought to ensure that the old boy is brought to his senses.

Speaking as one currently straddling the divide between pretty girl and old woman, I might add that a foolproof way of reminding a man next to you of your presence is to wordlessly grip his thigh under the table. He cannot ignore you after that, and the other guests need be none the wiser.

All of this may sound like rather a lot of work, for everyone. And indeed, times have changed since the days when an invitation to a dinner party would conjure up innocent and happy visions of eating, drinking, being merry, and meeting new people in the full anticipation of compatibility. Today some people may enjoy being merry but want to eat and drink as little as possible, and they are saying "Please don't introduce us to new people—we haven't got time to process the friends we already have. If we are to meet new people, sorry to be ruthless, but we have come to harbor high expectations. The barriers between ambition and pleasure are becoming more and more blurred, so please may we sit next to someone who might be a likely marriage partner, someone famous, someone who will supply us with good anecdotal material that we can later recycle in our own conversational repertoires, or someone who will be of use to us in our careers?"

Well, that's it: the very-worst-case scenario. Party givers must of course be sensitive to the hopes and expectations of their increasingly demanding guests. Fortunately, though, there are still plenty of real people around who take the view that if someone is good enough to go to the trouble and expense of throwing a nice dinner party, then they will be rightly thankful for whatever they eat and whomever they meet. ■

THE STATIONERY SELF

There is no substitute for engraved writing paper

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

A few months ago I was browsing through a linen-covered wooden folio of engraved paper in the Rome branch of Pineider, Italy's most elegant stationer. I was revisiting a youthful fascination with lettering and paper—one that extended from my childhood, when I exploited my older brother's interest in letterpress printing to obtain my first personalized stationery, through early trips abroad, when I visited engravers and wished I could afford to place an order. Twenty years ago, when the dollar was strong against the lire, I spent whole afternoons poring over the choices at Pineider's flagship store, in Florence, finally settling on a typeface and paper. The design I chose—simple but peculiarly Italian block capitals, printed in gray ink on gray-bordered paper and heavy cards—became as fixed a part of my identity as gray flannels during the week, khakis on weekends, and stopping at every pastry shop.

My taste in typefaces may have shifted slightly over two decades, but not my belief in the primacy of the letter—the noblest and certainly the pleasantest form of communication. A handwritten note remains the only real acknowledgment of a gift or a kindness, and I disapprove of another person's delay in sending one nearly as strongly as I do of my own. I never discard handwritten cards and letters, luxuriating in their look and feel on receipt and again during infrequent and usually unsuccessful attempts to store them in an orderly way. And nothing is as handsome, or as serious in intent, as engraved paper.

Recently my sister and brother-in-law found the house they'd been looking for, the one in which they plan to see their young children into adulthood. To mark the occasion my family

gave them engraved house stationery, with the address as letterhead. We ordered it from Crane, the U.S. equivalent of Pineider in history and reputation. As I looked through Crane's books of stationery, I thought again about matching typeface and paper to a sense of self. Learning that Crane produces its paper and personalized stationery in my state, Massachusetts, prompted me to visit the company to see firsthand a process that had helped define me. And knowing I would be in Italy made me decide to compare what I saw at Crane with the way things are done nowadays at Pineider.

Things had changed in Italy: not the beauty of the displays or the correctness of the tailored salespeople but the vast choice of typefaces I remembered being both bewildered and enchanted by. Now there were just seven, a salesman told me, as he opened a large binder of cardboard pages—the most popular and classic styles. I glanced at the shaded and cursive and unornamented faces, both comforted and vaguely disappointed that they included a version of my plain block capitals. Wasn't anything else available? I asked.

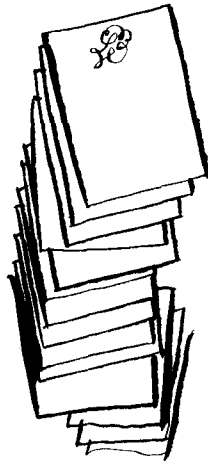
Eventually the folio containing stationery ordered over several decades appeared, accompanied by the man who had served most of the customers whose paper it contained. Carlo Bertolaccini has sold Pineider stationery in Rome for forty-four years. He looks something like John Gielgud and speaks with a reserve that seems to cloak wit and a deep understanding of human desires. The factory in Florence might or might not be able to reproduce any style that caught my eye, Bertolaccini told me; young people willing to apprentice themselves to a skilled engraver are

rare, and the lifetime artisans are retiring or gone. The seven styles in the new book are typeset by computer, and the dies are created by acid bath rather than incised by hand start to finish—as every die was until five or so years ago. Hand-etched “classico” dies are still offered as a higher-priced alternative to typeset dies. But he couldn't guarantee that any of the remaining artisans would be willing or able to etch a typeface long out of use.

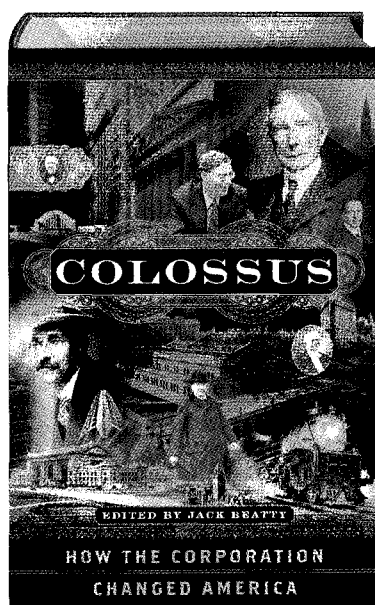
As I turned over sheet after sheet, Bertolaccini pointed out letterheads and colors he found particularly successful, occasionally seizing one as if it were an old friend and holding it up to the light. Then I saw a very familiar gray-bordered sheet, and my own name.

Unlike Pineider, Crane uses only computers to create the lettering for its dies, having decided decades ago to digitize the typefaces it offers and to keep a wide range in active use. Despite the abandonment of hand-incised typefaces, a remarkable amount of the work that goes into Crane's stationery is still done by hand, I discovered when I drove last winter to its factory in North Adams, a scrappy former mill town in the northwest corner of Massachusetts. Long economically depressed, though proud of its history and its commanding position high in the Berkshires, North Adams has recently seen a revival with the opening of Mass MoCA, a contemporary-arts center in a renovated textile-factory complex.

The plant where Crane, a family firm marking its 200th anniversary this year, produces its engraved stationery is a few miles down the road from Mass MoCA, in a bland modern building the company has occupied since 1988. “We thought we'd be playing soccer in here,” Ed Czarnecki, the director of product development, told me as he gestured toward a large factory floor covered with a haphazard assortment of presses and work tables. “Instead we've grown by leaps and bounds.” The continued activity on the printing floor as afternoon turned to evening testified to the solid three to five percent annual rise in engraved-stationery sales in the 1990s—years when e-mail was the-



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oretically replacing posted letters, and when PCs and laser printers put graphic design and stationery production within reach of anyone. The desire for something palpable, handsome, and handmade (or at least partially handmade) apparently endures.

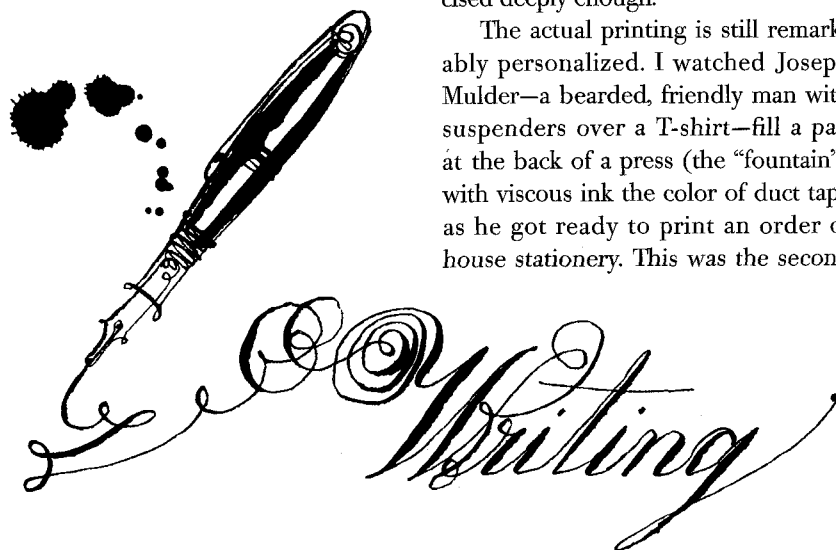
The second floor has been fortified to bear the weight of the die archive, which is housed in an appealing jumble of wooden-drawered file cabinets and steel shelves. The small, heavy dies are wrapped in white paper and string; some are filed by name, others by number. The many-ton library represents only ten years' worth of names. Every year, Czarnecki told me, the factory ships off dies that have remained dormant for ten years. I had imagined that a die would be kept forever. Melting one down seems akin to trying to recycle someone's soul.

The first aisle we walked through was devoted, surprisingly, to Tiffany: Crane has produced all of the store's stationery since 1977, and also makes most of Cartier's personalized stationery and Christmas cards. It produces a separate line of watermarked paper and boxes and a specially designed typeface for each company. (Later, above a work station, I saw a large robin's-egg-blue Tiffany box marked BIG RUBBER BANDS.) Almost no one else produces engraved stationery in the United States: Dempsey & Carroll, a Baltimore company with stores in Washington and New York, may be the only other company with a national presence.

"When it comes to the social-stationery game, there are not many players," Czarnecki said. "It's a tough business. There's a high volume of small orders, all of them custom. You can't just lock up the press and run it. Every day we get hundreds of calls asking to step up an order or pull it in the middle of production to make a change. We go through every order sheet by sheet, doing cleaning and eraser work. We tie the ribbons on each birth announcement and count and band every box." Czarnecki, a carefully dressed man, joined the company forty-four years ago.

The workers' involvement in what they do seemed unstaged. "It's a little boy—a real little one," a woman said as she showed me the artwork for the birth announcement of a baby weighing three pounds, ten ounces. The artwork was in the form of a photographic negative, as for offset printing, which would be chemically etched onto a copper plate. Creating letters by machine rather than by hand means the loss of the unevenness and individual eccentricity that until recently made every Pincider die, for example, unique. But it does allow great freedom in the choice of what can be engraved. The staff artists, I was assured, could reproduce by hand any historical type style that took my fancy—but the style would probably be in the Crane archives anyway. Nor have etching tools disappeared. In the die-making room I saw workers examine for flaws copper plates just out of an acid bath and regouge by hand parts of characters that hadn't been incised deeply enough.

The actual printing is still remarkably personalized. I watched Joseph Mulder—a bearded, friendly man with suspenders over a T-shirt—fill a pan at the back of a press (the "fountain") with viscous ink the color of duct tape as he got ready to print an order of house stationery. This was the second



time Mulder would feed each full-size sheet through the press. He had already printed an address at the bottom, and this pass was for the name of the house, in the upper right.

Crane's and other American presses are designed for water-based inks, which are matte, and European presses for oil-based inks, which are glossy. The difference in appearance can be dramatic, as I saw on a visit to the small, modern factory where Pineider prints its stationery, in a gorgeous part of Tuscany near Florence and bordering Chianti. If the Crane printing floor was the size of a soccer field, the Pineider floor was barely the size of two squash courts. Along one wall I saw slatted wooden racks, like the ones at an old-fashioned bakery, covered with sheets hand-arranged to expose only the familiar logo of a U.S.-based car company at the top left corner. The logos looked like shiny blue pools. I also saw the opulent gold and silver miter and keys of the papal seal.

Rote as the hand-feeding might seem, the printer's work in setting up an order is almost as detailed as the inspectors' after it is finished. The printer must prepare a "counterboard," which ensures that under tons of pressure the die won't cut straight through the paper. The counterboard looks like a piece of white foamcore with cutouts to receive lines of text on the metal plate. How closely the printer hews to the outline of the text in cutting the counterboard determines how much flattened, shiny paper will surround each line on the engraved sheet or card—a telltale sign of true engraving, along with the indentation on the back. The sort of people who flip china over to find the maker always run a finger over the back of a letterhead.

Finger runners are making sure that the process was not thermography, usually thought of as cut-rate engraving. Thermography is straightforward off-set printing, in which a piece of black plastic is put directly onto an automated press instead of onto a piece of metal to etch a die. The difference between thermography and "flat" printing, the kind used in magazines and newspapers, is a final sprinkling of powdered glue

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over the wet ink, which mixes with it to create raised letters. (Excess glue is removed by vacuum, and the ink is dried under hot blowers.) Nice as thermography can look, it can never offer the depth and desirable unevenness of engraving, let alone the tactile pleasure.

The thickness of the counterboard and the force of the press determine the depth of the indentation in engraving, and the printer adjusts both according to his and the customer's preference. "Some people want heavy bruising," Mulder told me. The goal at Pineider is the opposite: workmen try to cut the counterboard to produce a clear image with a minimum of flattening around the letters, and adjust the pressure to cause the subtlest indentation. This may be because Pineider has never offered thermography. "Why bother with a halfway step?" Riccardo Capecchiacci, the director of Pineider production, asked when I visited. "It's so much less elegant."

Crane has long offered both thermography and engraving, and now the choices of typeface, ink color, and paper are also the same. The difference is price. Because thermographed sheets whiz through the press and engraved sheets are fed one by one, engraving costs an average of a third more. At Crane, Mulder told me while hand-feeding the sheets for the engraving job I had watched him set up, "almost no one asks for light bruising."

"Look at this O," Bertolaccini said at the Rome branch of Pineider, as he held my stationery up to the light. "It's much flatter than the regular *bastoncino*." The block capitals I had long ago chosen, usually labeled gothic in this country, are called "little sticks" in Italian. He opened an old book of Pineider type styles, the kind made only by hand, and found a page of six or seven *bastoncino* styles, each subtly different. He showed me mine, with its shapely but not exaggerated horizontal compression. "This was my favorite," he

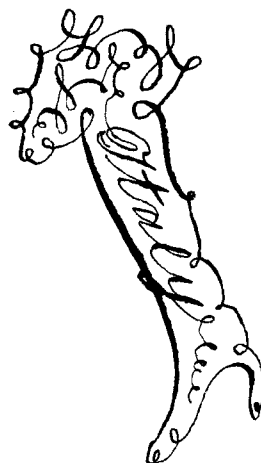
said. "I directed all my clients toward it. It's clean, handsome, and linear. You can never tire of it." I felt immensely gratified.

I had already seen how my name looked in the current version of *bastoncino* when I visited the Pineider factory, where a woman who designs orders printed my name on her screen and compared it with the engraved card I had brought. Not only the shape of the letters but also the spacing was quite different. She tinkered with the image on the screen to make it more like the lettering on my card—adjustments similar to those she makes for each order, she told me. It was pleasing, but it wasn't the same. I was glad that, for now, the *classico* option of hand-incised dies is still available.

I showed Bertolaccini a style I had fallen for, a kind of Art Nouveau—Art Deco take on *bastoncino* that seemed utterly Italian. Ah, he said with gentle reservation—however captivating, novelty will wear off. Better to stay

with a timeless face and with unobtrusive but elegant colors for paper and ink. And don't make the characters too big, he said when I showed him letterheads similar to mine but in a larger type size I found impressive. The discreet size the Pineider engraver had picked for my name was the right one, he assured me. But he would move the letterhead down a half centimeter the next time I ordered.

All this remains good advice for buying stationery. I've found that correspondence cards—the size of postcards but nearly as heavy as pasteboard, with just a name or a monogram centered at the top or on the upper left—are by far the most versatile, fine for very short notes yet with room for a surprising amount of text on front and back. Monarch-size paper (7 1/4 x 10 1/2 inches) is best for personal stationery; business sheets look like they're for business. Fancy faces and fancy colors and other whimsical attempts at individuality may provoke the sort of gently reproving



look Bertolaccini gave my new infatuation, not to mention your own eventual disenchantment. You can loosen your color restraints when picking an envelope lining. Unless you're as sure as my sister is of remaining at one address, you might stick to your name only, which will reduce the cost. Be sure you know where the die will be stored and for how long. Crane maintains an informative and helpful site at Crane.com, which will tell you where you can obtain a sample of your name in a certain typeface. (A hundred engraved Crane correspondence cards with name only and unprinted, unlined envelopes costs \$160, which includes a one-time charge for the die. The same number of thermographed cards costs \$127.) Pineider.com is for now unfortunately outdated, uninformative, and only in Italian, but the company promises a redesigned and bilingual site by the end of the year. At the Web site of the English firm Smythson (Smythson.com) you can download a catalogue of beautiful papers or order a gorgeously produced sample packet of its papers and engraving styles—all still hand-etched, a salesperson at the Bond Street headquarters told me, and the handsomest and most extensive range I found.

I invited Bertolaccini for a coffee, and he took me to a bar in the lobby of an Art Nouveau theater next door, where he immediately pointed out that the lettering on a period poster was similar to one of the typefaces I had liked. Even though the company had already changed hands several times since it went out of the Pineider family, in 1989, Bertolaccini told me he was confident about its future. Engraved stationery is still a rite of passage open to all. "Not everyone is born high," he said. "We're the *massimo*"—the summit—and even those of modest means can afford it.

I thought of my pleasure when I opened my first box of Pineider cards, each bundle of twenty-five wrapped by hand in tissue paper, and how much a part of me those gray letters now seem. I thought of my sister's joy at opening our gift to her family. "Now I know it's really our house," she said. ▀

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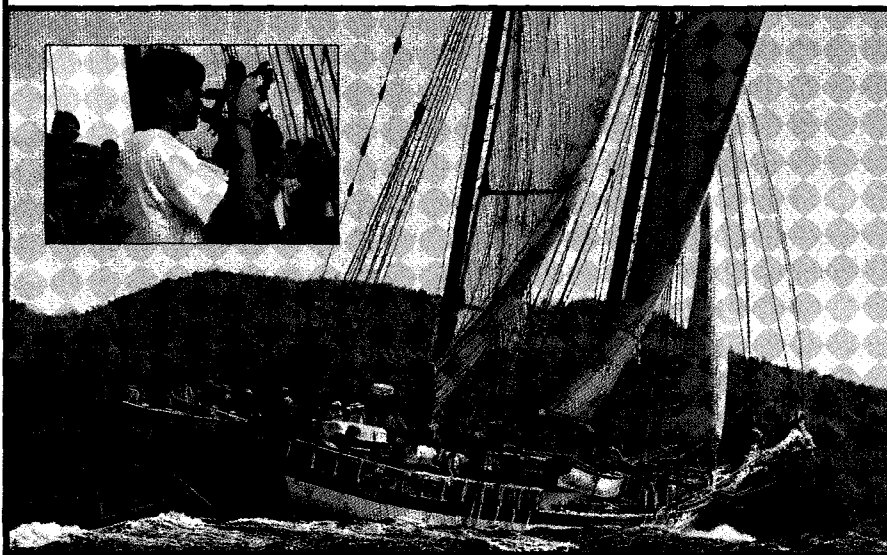
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HONG KONG AND MACAU REFLAGGED

They may now be part of China, but they remain distinct—and distinctly marvelous

BY JAMIE JAMES

.....

Five years ago Hong Kong was the world headquarters of the Chicken Little Society: the Commies were coming, a disastrous brain drain was imminent, the free market was in dire peril, all civil liberties were about to be dumped into Victoria Harbor. As everyone now knows, nothing of the sort happened. Although the transition from "crown colony" to "special administrative region" has not been without hiccups, Hong Kong nonetheless remains in every essential way what it was throughout the second half of the twentieth century: the most vibrant, cosmopolitan city in the Far East. Last fall I decided that it had been too long since my previous visit, so I went to have a look for myself. I made it my mission to do some of the things that visitors have always liked to do and that are worth doing more than once, as well as to discover what's new. And I wanted to spend some time in the other new special administrative region in the area, Macau, which Portugal returned to China in 1999.

I found changes, of course: There is a new flag, with a stylized flower on it. And here and there I saw gaggles of adolescent soldiers in the bright-green uniforms of the People's Liberation Army, setting out traffic cones and doing other innocuous chores. I have visited Hong Kong periodically over the past twelve years, and on every trip I have discovered a new city. I am happy to report that Hong Kong today is, if anything, even more exciting than it was before the handover, its special character intact.

It's hard to explain what makes Hong Kong so exhilarating. When I tell my friends in New York or Chicago about the spectacular skyscrapers, the beautiful parks, the great shopping and restaurants, they look at me skeptically and ask, Why should I go halfway around the world for that? Yet I persist:

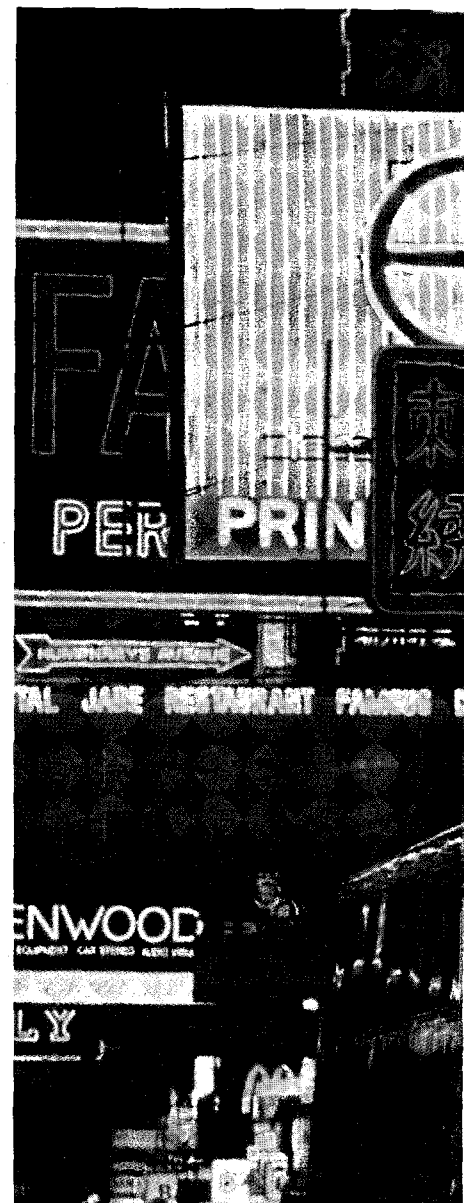
for twenty years I lived in Manhattan, generally reckoned to be an exciting place, but every time I visit Hong Kong, I feel like the cowboy in *Oklahoma!* singing about his first trip to Kansas City. Like New York and London, Hong Kong gives a visitor the immediate sensation that he has arrived at the center of everything. On the first night of my recent visit, as twilight fell through a violet mist, I strolled along a harborside walkway on the mainland, in Kowloon. The lights of the skyscrapers on Hong Kong Island gleamed brightly, a ferry hooted, deep and musical, and I felt with a shiver that at that moment no other place in the world mattered.

To begin with, as anyone who has ever visited Hong Kong can attest, there's the spectacular physical setting. To an even greater extent than Sydney or San Francisco, the city is defined by water, by its splendid harbor. And one doesn't simply look at it: part of the thrill of Hong Kong is that one is continually crossing back and forth between the Kowloon peninsula and the island, the city's two most populous districts, where tourists tend to spend the bulk of their time—though venturesome travelers who take the ferry to some of Hong Kong's outlying islands can actually find secluded beaches and quiet fishing villages. I always avoid crossing the harbor by taxi, in the crowded tunnel, and take the Star Ferry, which may be the world's greatest public-transport bargain—the equivalent of thirty cents for a brisk, pleasant cruise with the best view to be had of the city's skyline.

Hong Kong's Empire State Building, its Eiffel Tower, is the tram that goes up to Victoria Peak. This time I invited an acquaintance of mine, Jason Wordie, a young Australian-born historian who gives walking tours as a sideline, to come with me. The bus is cheaper, but riding with the tourists on the 113-year-old

funicular railway is much more fun. The Peak Tram, lugging Swiss-made cars, glides up the steep mountainside as tall office towers and apartment buildings drift by. The view from the peak is so spectacular, and the lush wooded countryside so refreshing, that even local residents come up as often as they can. Hong Kong Island falls away dizzyingly at one's feet, and Kowloon looms across the harbor, which is busily plied by ships and ferries of every kind (except, alas, the junks of yore). Beyond, stretching to the horizon, lie the mountains of the New Territories, Hong Kong's northernmost district, shimmering in the haze.

At the top I found a post-handover project I wasn't sure I approved of: the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFFREY AARONSON/NETWORK ASPEN



new Peak Tower, a commercial extravaganza filled with shops and children's rides, in the bizarre shape of a quarter moon atop huge pillars—rather like the Greek letter pi. A friend later explained to me that it closely resembles the Chinese character for “profit”: buildings in Hong Kong are designed as much to be auspicious, according to ancient principles of feng shui, as to satisfy anyone's aesthetic taste.

It was time for lunch, so I invited Jason to choose a restaurant. No place in the world serves better Chinese food than Hong Kong. On my first several visits to the city I feasted on its myriad variations—local Cantonese, fiery Sichuan, hearty Hakka, the cholesterol heaven known as Peking duck. Shang-

hainese cuisine has become all the rage in recent years. Yet whenever I let my friends, whether Chinese or expatriates, decide where to go for a meal, they always seem to choose Western food, which restaurants do a better job of here than they do in most Asian cities. Jason and I went to an old-time favorite, the Peak Cafe, which looks down on the island's seaward side. Sitting in the café's leafy garden, we fortified ourselves with oysters and beefsteaks.

Jason's academic specialty is the colonial period, specifically Hong Kong's military history, a subject about which he has published a book. After lunch we rode the tram back down for an impromptu colonial tour. We peeked in at Saint John's Cathedral (as it's called,

though it's no bigger than most parish churches in England), a charming building dating back to 1847. Inside, in a dark, quiet corner, the walls are hung with colonial-era flags and pennons, which were buried to avoid capture by the Japanese during World War II. On the bluff above us was Government House, a rambling architectural hodgepodge, which was the official residence of the colonial governor from 1851 until Chris Patten, the last of the line, moved out. Now it serves as a government guesthouse and banquet hall.

From there we meandered down a footpath that led us directly to the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building, Norman Foster's spectacular masterpiece, a soaring tower that sits on pillars,

so one can walk underneath it. A pair of bronze lions flank the entrance; Jason pointed out some nicks on one of them, caused by a Japanese shell. It being Sunday, the courtyards and walkways downtown were jammed with Filipina maids on their day off, playing cards, gossiping, and singing. We saw one woman on her knees, fervently leading a prayer service in a parking lot.

Our walk concluded in Hong Kong Park, one of the city's prettiest green places. We took in the Museum of Tea-ware, in Flagstaff House, formerly the residence of the British military commander, a beautifully restored white mansion, pillared and shuttered in cool neoclassical style. In the park there was something of a traffic jam of weddings—perhaps a dozen parties in brilliantly colored gowns and tuxedos, waiting their turn to tie the knot at a picturesque little pavilion and be photographed by the sparkling fountains. We hiked up to the park's aviary, a favorite spot of mine, where a slice of tropical forest grows inside a vast ellipsoidal wire-mesh tent, with open wooden walkways winding through several levels. The birds wheeled over and around us, singing and cawing and screeching, and sometimes perched for a moment on the handrail to have a look at us. (Historical walking tours with Jason Wordie can be booked by visiting www.jasonswalks.com.)

I've always been fond of Kowloon, and I was relieved to find it still its old self. After the frantic bustle of the island, the peninsula seems almost sedate. It has few impressively tall skyscrapers, as a result of building restrictions imposed when the city's airport was here, before the new terminal opened on outlying Chek Lap Kok Island, in 1998. Now Kowloon will join the island in the race to the sky—though in the meantime, of course, it has spectacular views of the island's skyline. When you alight from the Star Ferry, you're within strolling distance of the city's cultural center, a bizarre piece of public architecture that was officially opened in 1989 by the Prince and Princess of Wales. City planners tore down the train station at the peninsula's tip,



In Macau, Leal Senado square, with its traditional Portuguese tile work

leaving only the graceful clock tower, and later built a pink-tile complex of museums and theaters whose architecture is widely reviled yet which nonetheless works. The art museum has a fine collection of Chinese art, and the concert hall is home to the Hong Kong Philharmonic, probably the best Western symphony orchestra in Asia.

Perhaps the most famous symbol of the colonial era is the Peninsula Hotel, popularly known as the Pen, which opened in 1928. Its elegant pillared lobby, built according to strict classical proportions, with a string quartet playing from a balcony, is the swellest place in town to have afternoon tea. I came one evening to have a look at Felix, the hotel's chic rooftop restaurant, designed in phosphorescent, futuristic style by Philippe Starck. I met a Chinese friend of mine, a schoolteacher named Georges, at the American Bar, where we lingered over a perfect margarita for me and a Coke, presumably perfect, for him. I thought I might finally have a chance to eat Chinese food, but he wanted to take me to SoHo, an area south of Hollywood Road, where hip new restaurants and bars are always opening up. The hip new Vietnamese place we wanted to try was closed for a private party, so we went to the hip new Australian place next door, where we were disappointed by a rather bland dinner. Georges apologized for the neighborhood's silly new

name. "London and New York had one," he said, "so we had to have one too. A lot of people disapprove, associating the name with London's Soho when it was a red-light district."

Hong Kong has many excellent hotels, with virtually all the major chains represented, in many cases by their premier properties. The Pen, in Kowloon, is unquestionably the grandest of the grand, with beautifully decorated rooms and extraordinary service—though local folk always point out that you get the same view from its next-door neighbor, the Salisbury YMCA, at a fraction of the cost. Across the harbor my favorite is the Island Shangri-La, which has spectacular harbor and Victoria Peak views, and the largest guest rooms on the island. Many experienced travelers swear by the Mandarin Oriental. Just a bit out of the Central district—near the Peak Tram and Star Ferry terminals, Hong Kong Park, and other spots popular with visitors—is the Wesley, a full-service hotel that is well regarded and relatively inexpensive.

Macau, forty-five minutes away by boat, has a bad reputation among Hong Kongers as a tacky place for gambling and various nefarious pursuits, but in my two days there I didn't once set foot in a den of iniquity, and I left wishing that I had allotted it at least twice as much time. Macau is small but alluring,

and completely different from the big city nearby. For one thing, it's much older: in Hong Kong nineteenth-century colonial buildings count as heirlooms, but Portuguese merchants and Jesuit missionaries, in the wake of Saint Francis Xavier, began settling Macau in the early sixteenth century. Vestiges of Portuguese rule are everywhere; more than once I turned a corner into a little plaza full of perfectly preserved colonial buildings, painted bubble-gum pink and mustard yellow and lime green, with striped awnings shading their shuttered windows, and thought that I had somehow been transported to a picturesque European fishing village.

But of course I hadn't: I was in China ... sort of. Fewer than half a million people live on the little peninsula of Macau and its outlying islands, and the pace of life here, after Hong Kong Island or even Kowloon, seems tranquil. Like Hong Kong, Macau is a great place for walking, but one moves at a more languorous pace here. I poked around for a full day without a guidebook, and then looked everything up when I got back to my hotel: the towering, fantastical façade of the church of São Paulo, which is all that's left, after a fire in 1835, of what was in its day one of the most magnificent Christian churches in the world; the superb Maritime Museum, full of meticulous scale models of the ships that have sailed the seas here since ancient times; the 500-year-old temple consecrated to A-Ma, goddess of seafarers, where sailors still come to burn joss sticks and pray for a safe passage; Camões Garden, named for Portugal's greatest poet (no one knows for sure whether he even visited Macau, but there is a bronze bust of him here anyway, in a little grotto). Next to the garden is the Old Protestant Cemetery, with mossy tombstones detailing the deaths at sea of the English and American sailors buried there (poor Samuel Smith "died by a fall from aloft").

I wandered down a twisty alleyway called Rua de Ervanários, paved, like many of Macau's larger plazas, in a sinuous black-and-white wave motif, reflecting the enclave's Iberian origins. A fat tailor dozed in his doorway; old

ladies played mah-jongg; merchants selling jade and gold invited me inside their shops with a courteous wave of the hand and a duck of the chin.

I loved my hotel: the Pousada de São Tiago is constructed over and amid the ruins of the seventeenth-century Fortaleza da Barra, a fortress built by the Portuguese to defend the southern tip of the peninsula. It is almost too charming, with painted-tile floors, fine mahogany antique-reproduction furniture, and Portuguese etched-glass chandeliers. My room had a little balcony overlooking the fortress's ramparts and the South China Sea. And, quaintest of all, it had a dial telephone. If you want modern luxury, the Mandarin Oriental Macau is a comfortable, well-appointed urban resort.

At the end of my trip I realized that there has been one change for the worse in Hong Kong since the handover: the new airport. Landing at Kai Tak, the old airport, was a thrilling aeronautical experience: the plane skimmed across the South China Sea and wended its way amid the skyscrapers, landing short on the single runway, which protruded into the harbor near Kowloon. Kai Tak was dangerous and overcrowded, and the services at the terminal were basic at best, but it was one of the few airports I have ever loved. Chek Lap Kok, the new airport, is impressive and modern, and everyone hates it: it's a million miles from town and lacks character. It is also much too vast: when you see golf carts for hire at an airport, that's not a good sign.

On my first visit to Hong Kong, I arrived in Victoria Harbor on a sailing ship, after a terrible storm in the South China Sea. Coasting into the placid waters of the harbor and beholding the amazing skyline of the city for the first time was one of the most extraordinary moments in my life as a traveler. Even before I disembarked, I felt in my bones that I had discovered an inexhaustible place. So far Hong Kong hasn't let me down. ■

For more information about Hong Kong, call the Hong Kong Tourist Association, at 800-282-4582, or visit its Web site at www.discoverhongkong.com. The Macau Government Tourist Office maintains a Web site at www.macautourism.gov.mo and is otherwise represented in the United States by Integrated Travel Resources, in Los Angeles, at 877-622-2800.

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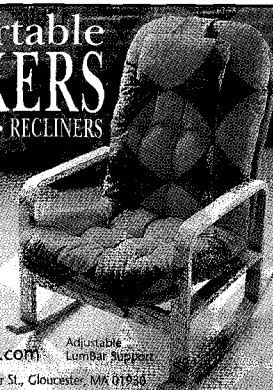
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EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

All Things Considered *has only improved with age, the author finds.*
But it could still aim for deeper realms

BY BILL MCKIBBEN

.....

Many years ago, when I was moving to one of the most rural corners of the eastern United States, I spent several days driving back roads with real-estate agents. Given my budget, I would look at anything—nothing was too ramshackle, too long on the market, too far from the road. Before I would even walk up the driveway, though, each property had to pass one test: could I pull in a National Public Radio station on my transistor, or was some mountain blocking the signal? If I couldn't hear NPR, I'd scratch the place off my list.

For most of my adult life *All Things Considered* (and the NPR programs that have descended from it) has been a regular part of my day. Trying to critique it is like trying to critique my golden retriever: her habits and tics have become so integral to my life that they no longer command conscious attention. Still, with *ATC* approaching its thirtieth birthday, on May 3, I kept wondering about something I'd always heard: that in its early years the program was fresher, more high-spirited, more venturesome. As early as 1982 Susan Stamberg wrote in her compendium *Every Night at Five* that the program's in-house joke was that the "Golden Age of *All Things Considered* was always six months before you came to work here."

NPR has a complete tape library of the program, reel after reel stretching back past the days of Watergate and the energy crisis, right to the very first broadcast, which coincided with a mammoth anti-war demonstration. ("Excuse me, sergeant," the reporter Jeff Kamen could be heard asking a police officer. "Is that a technique? Where the men actually try to drive the motorcycles right into the demonstrators?" "Naw, it's no technique," the sergeant replied. "We're trying to go down the road and the people get in front of you. What are you gonna do? You don't stop on a dime.") Shows from 1996 to the present are nicely catalogued

on the show's Web site, but tapes from before the 1990s are not easily available—a situation that some university or foundation should remedy, so that any report-writing high school student could get at these voices from the past on the Internet. These tapes demonstrate all sorts of things: for instance, that even just three decades ago Americans spoke much more colorful English, with a much wider array of accents; and also that the sheer amount of history-making news broadcast on any ordinary afternoon in the early seventies overwhelms our calmer time.

What the tapes don't demonstrate is an Edenic *All Things Considered*.



At the very, very beginning the show did sound different. The theme music was all cheerful Moog, and Mike Waters, one of the hosts, reverberated like a cross between Orson Welles and Jehovah. It didn't matter that his echoing voice moved through the news at a stately pace: the program's small staff was clearly struggling to come up with enough polished pieces to fill ninety minutes. In July of 1971, for instance, *ATC* reported on a conference of anti-war activists that the reporter described as "predictable." But that didn't stop him

from offering an uninterrupted five minutes and ten seconds of a speech by the former Alaska senator Ernest Gruening attacking U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Sound-bite journalism is surely the bane of our age, but I am duty-bound to say that anyone who now broadcast such segments each night would soon have no listeners. Perhaps we would be better off if we still had the ears for such rambling, but we don't.

Clearly the producers felt the same way, because by about 1977 the show had hit the stride it has maintained to this day—a combination of crisp professionalism and intelligent warmth that has built an audience of 1.6 million an evening. Carl Kasell was reading the news, Bob Edwards was co-hosting the program with Susan Stamberg (*Morning Edition*, Edwards's baby, was yet to be conceived), Linda Wertheimer and Ira Flatow were providing reports. Much of the current cast was in place: Noah Adams, Cokie Roberts, Scott Simon,

Robert Siegel. Though the show was covering newsmakers of the now distant past (Bert Lance!), and though some of the issues of the day seem bizarre to our ears (Robert Krulwich anchored a special report on why women might want to have jobs), the tone, the length, and the ambience would be instantly familiar to any current listener of *ATC* or *Morning Edition* or the weekend versions

of these shows. Right at the beginning the format could have gone in any number of directions. For instance, to close a 1971 report on pinball parlors Mike Waters cued The Who's "Pinball Wizard," not for twelve bars but for its glorious entirety. By about 1977, though, the show's experimentation had largely ended, and the daily lineup was set: harder news in the first and third half hours, softer stuff in the second and—since 1995, when the program expanded to two hours—fourth. Each half hour in turn progressed from newsier news to

MARK MATTHEO

features and interviews. Letters from listeners on Thursday. And so on.

To call it a formula sounds like criticism. In fact the routine has allowed for more variety than can be found on any other program on the air—wonderful contests (create an itinerary that would really show America to a visiting Chinese dignitary), numberless interviews (when Stamberg left the show, in 1986, to launch *Weekend Edition Sunday*, the staff presented her with a computer printout of the 15,000 interviews and reports she had done). The scripts are writerly. The hosts seem like good friends at the office: they're informal but without any of the phony, jokey banter that blights every commercial newscast. Best of all, the show has achieved a steadiness, a regularity, that allows it to take chances, to devote a quarter hour to some unlikely topic—say, the history of Patsy Cline's "Crazy"—without scaring off listeners. Trusting its quality, listeners give it the benefit of the doubt, in the same way that Beatles fans were willing to entertain the idea of sitars. Charles Kuralt, writing about the show a decade after it started, said, "It's obvious that it is not put together by jaded old geezers looking backward at humanity's wrecks and disasters, but by energetic young men and women looking ahead." That may be twenty years less true than it used to be, but for the most part those men and women have matured with little cynicism and much grace.

Noah Adams pointed out in his 1992 book about the program that hard news has slowly taken over more airtime—probably less a conscious decision than the simple result of more bureaus, more reporters, more people gathering more stuff. Perhaps the show's Washington-centered universe makes less sense than it did in the early 1970s, when the Vietnam War and Watergate drew attention naturally toward the Potomac. Yet it is National Public Radio, and clearly the program's producers feel the need to create something like a broadcast of record. In fact, since no commercial radio or TV show comes anywhere near the quality of *ATC* and its offspring, and since NPR owns the public-radio franchise for domestic news (the noble

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PRI/BBC production *The World* doesn't compete head-on with national stories), the show's only real peer is our newspaper of record, *The New York Times*. Both have one ambition: to tell you (within the limitations of the medium, of course) what you need to know. And it's here, in a funny, dual sense, that the technology of radio sometimes makes life difficult for Adams, Siegel, and company.

Covering the world comprehensively—even in the politically mainstream way in which both *ATC* and the *Times* tackle the task—means a certain number of boring stories. House subcommittees write tax policy; think tanks issue reports on prescription-drug policies. If you are going to be responsible, you've got to take note. Newspaper readers can and do skip stories, glancing at the headlines, confident that they've been filed for history, and moving on to the movie reviews. And the newspaper, at least the *Times*, has enough space to pay careful attention to a dull story without slighting something else. On radio, of course, you have to listen to the damn thing, and the three minutes it fills up is three minutes less for something else. No one complains that the *Times* focuses too much on Washington, because you can read the paper happily your whole life without ever getting two paragraphs past a D.C. dateline.

Radio has another property that complicates the lives of those trying to decide what should fill *ATC*'s daily two hours. At its best radio achieves a kind of intimacy that allows something much more personal than print journalism does. A newspaper feature may contain a few funny or revealing quotations, but it is exceedingly rare for papers to devote the kind of space necessary to flesh out a picture of any one human being. That's why we have magazine feature stories and novels. Something about the human voice, though, even speaking only a few dozen words, can take you straight from the news into a deeper realm. Human voices keep listeners sitting in their driveways long after they've gotten home, as the radio slowly drains the battery, unable to turn off the man who is watching his father die, or the boy who is flunking out of school, or the woman who has gotten over drinking, or ... It's

not Cronkite and Murrow who set the bar but Zola and Orwell and both Tom Wolfes, not to mention Johnny Cash and Preston Sturges. Such pieces transform *All Things Considered* from merely the best radio show there ever was into something much more. They turn regular listeners into fanatics. Maybe a few a month, maybe a few dozen a year, those stories have always come, often from freelance producers. One accepts them as occasional gifts and is grateful.

Five years ago the former *ATC* producer Ira Glass launched *This American Life*, a weekly hour of such pieces. Working with a small staff and a fairly small budget, Glass manages epiphanies

**For most of my
adult life *All Things
Considered*, now
celebrating its
thirtieth anniversary,
has been a regular
part of my day. Trying
to critique it is like
trying to critique my
golden retriever: her
habits and tics have
become so integral
to my life that they
no longer command
conscious attention.**

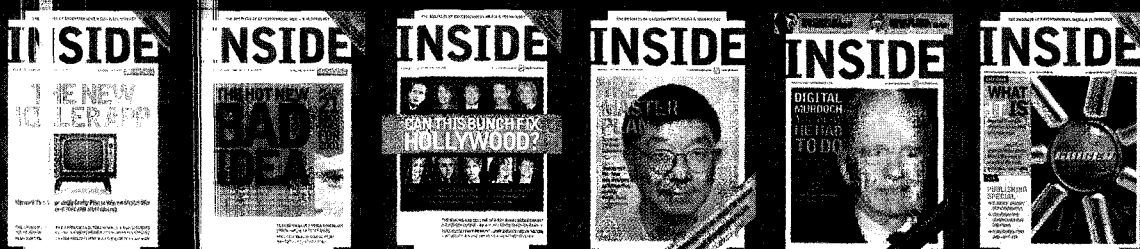
on an almost regular basis. Though sometimes he has a writer read a short story, it's usually all reporting—but reporting in the broadest sense. Here are some men who work in a grain elevator—why do they listen to soap operas while they work? What do the soap operas mean to them? Here is a couple who moved back to their rural-Missouri home town after forty years in the city—why do they run into such hostility when they try to spruce up the community? Week after week, in pieces that are twenty or thirty or even sixty minutes long, Glass and company somehow manage to achieve both the smooth professionalism that is

the hallmark of *ATC* and the urgent sense that they are inventing something new. The program quickly built a relatively huge and devoted audience. Unlike *ATC*, which comes on at drive time, *This American Life* requires fans to find a radio Sunday afternoons at three, or Saturday evenings, or at whatever other inconvenient hours local stations broadcast the show. Despite that handicap, and despite (or because of) Glass's aggressively unradio voice, it has emerged as the first real challenge *All Things Considered* has ever faced.

Every week Glass shows exactly how much is possible with a microphone and a DAT deck. It's as if he has announced that radio is still an infant art that offers immense possibilities for exploring the human condition—that from individual stories it can describe a time, a generation. Picking a weekly theme (“the allure of crime,” “do-gooders,” “the kindness of strangers”) unties him from the daily news and forces his staff to think about how people actually live their lives. An hour on “kids as adults” featured a twenty-minute memoir of life as a teenage ambulance driver, a boy who gave up his teenage years to play the trumpet, and a twelve-year-old who had to decide whether or not to leave Vietnam on a boat. One hour of this stuff each week does not sate the appetite. Once you've heard it, you wonder, Why can't I listen to stories like these every single day? Why aren't they on *All Things Considered* every day? Why can't I sit transfixed in the driveway every night?

Luckily for the editors of the *Times*, no one asks them such questions. They have a clear role in the information economy. But *All Things Considered* was, in the words of its founder, Bill Siemerling, supposed to “celebrate the human experience.” Somehow we want it to tell us about the Federal Reserve and also reach the innermost parts of us. In the 360-degree spectrum of what it means to be a human being, the *Times* can reach maybe 90 degrees—love is more or less beyond its grasp, and thus so is an awful lot else. Radio can come pretty close to considering all things. That's why it's possible to hope that this best of all shows may get better still. ▀

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BOOKS & CRITICS

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In her latest novel, as in all her work, Anne Tyler explores un-hip, gentle lives of fortitude and decency

BY KATHARINE WHITTEMORE

.....

Anne Tyler "is not merely good, she is *wickedly* good," John Updike has written. It's the kind of blurb that publicists wish upon a star for, and, in fact, it often sequins the flaps and covers of Tyler's fifteen novels. Updike's words always take me aback. Not that I don't think Tyler is extremely good—furtively, sometimes wincingly good. No, I trip over that "*wickedly*." It implies a stylistic brashness and a certain oh-so-Updikean lubricity, neither of which traits remotely gilds her outlook. We're talking Anne *Tyler* here, not Anne *Rice*. The truth is that Tyler's body of work may have less to do with the body, the erotic, than that of any other major American writer today. Her plainsong prose is so well made—not to mention popular in a Hallmark Hall of Fame kind of way—that it doesn't quite register with the dressed-in-black literati. One doesn't go to Tyler for the shock of the new. One goes to her for the pull of the old, because her preoccupations are more in line with, say, George Eliot's than Don DeLillo's. And those preoccupations? Well, Tyler's books all teem with family, and virtually all of them chronicle repression shaded by grief—who fights it, who succumbs to it.

Listen to the proper, aged patriarch Daniel Peck, for instance, in her sixth novel, *Searching for Caleb* (1975):

In my childhood I was trained to hold things in, you see. But I thought I was holding them until a certain time. I assumed that someday, some-

where, I would again be given the opportunity to spend all that saved-up feeling. When will that be?

When, indeed? Lifelong provincial repression is hardly a topic to start a buzz in *The New York Review of Books*. Maybe that's why Updike's "*wickedly*" has such legs. It's a sexy selling point for unsexy books; to be fair, it also conjures Tyler's strong and—depending on whom you ask—charming or irksome antic side. If one knows this author only from *The Accidental Tourist* (1985), her most famous title (the movie version

was nominated for a best-picture Oscar), one has pushed through that Tylerian copse of pinched repression and zany pluck. To wit:

BACK WHEN WE WERE GROWNUPS

by Anne Tyler
Knopf
256 pages, \$25.00

Macon Leary, is a prim, shut-down sort, separated from his wife and mourning his late son. Muriel Pritchett is the endearingly feisty, red-nail-polished single mom who cajoles Macon back to life.

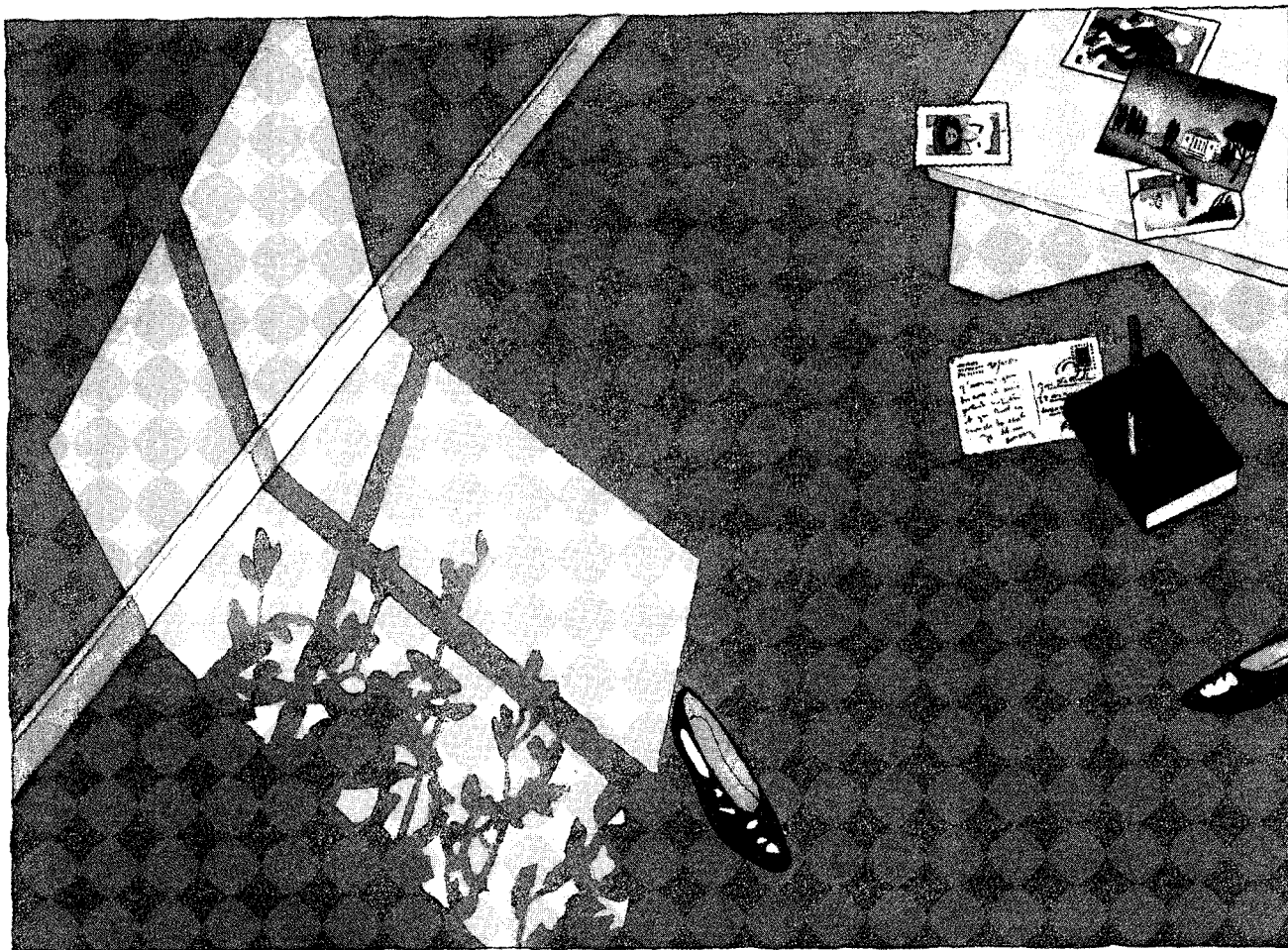
Most Tyler novels contain a Macon and a Muriel. The Macons all have pilot lights blueing to black. The Muriels are dog trainers or fortune tellers or clutter counselors with unruly hair and flame-up-high spirits. Whatever one thinks of such juxtaposition (it works in *The Accidental Tourist*, I think, but feels forced in most of the other books), it grinds into the core of Tyler's oeuvre, to the point where her very reputation splits in twain.

One feels like the Frank Burns of reviewers, disapproving of such versatility. Judging by Tyler's sales figures, readers seem happy ferreting out the

fun; they aren't fazed by her humor or by the tonal switchbacks between (and within) her novels. I'm fazed, though. I think Tyler's comic gifts are uneven at best, but her gifts as a serious, moving chronicler of a certain kind of American family are supreme. She has written one masterpiece, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982), which I love unreservedly. It sounds hardly a comic note throughout, and was nominated for a Pulitzer, only to be bested by Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Tyler has also tendered us two near masterpieces, *The Accidental Tourist* and *Saint Maybe* (1991), the first tragicomic leaning toward tragic, the second a brown study of duty, redemption, and, to quote Emily Dickinson, "that pale sustenance, Despair!"

Nonetheless, a chunk of Tyler's critical acclaim arises from her "funny" books. In 1980, for instance, *Morgan's Passing* was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Morgan is a latter-day Walter Mitty, and the story's other characters include puppeteers, a fact that makes me tired just typing it. *Morgan's Passing* is full of hugger-mugger (Updike called it "manic"), and is my least favorite of Tyler's novels. As for her biggest award, the Pulitzer in 1989, it alighted on *Breathing Lessons*, a sometimes powerful consideration of one day in the life of a marriage. Sometimes powerful. At other times *Breathing* blows it, stirring up so much tiresome slapstick that one wonders if one has failed to register some Beckettian ain't-life-absurd statement. Or if the book just plain isn't funny. Maggie, the flighty and meddlesome wife, barrels into a Pepsi truck. Maggie jumps headfirst into a laundry cart. Maggie is caught unzipping her husband's fly at a funeral.

Okay, there's a *little* sex in Tyler's books—a fact that might have tickled Updike, but, strangely, he had lost interest (at least in print) by the time *Breathing*



Lessons came out. A few years earlier, however, he had reviewed five of Tyler's novels in succession. That "wickedly" sentence comes from his first review, of *Searching for Caleb*. After *Caleb*, though Updike was ambivalent at times, he was ever generous, even about the subpar *Earthly Possessions* (1977)—an odd tale of a woman taken not-very-hostile hostage by a bank robber which is, unfortunately, marred by Tyler's other major flaw: a sort of fey, nettlesome improbability of plot. As for *The Accidental Tourist*, Updike gave it qualified praise. He extended his most reverent sentences to its predecessor, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. When you get right down to it, though, Updike's involvement with Tyler seemed to matter more for its quantity than for its quality. I mean, five reviews in a row? The implication was loud: If U was watching so closely, then T must be someone to watch. Still, Tyler isn't easy to place in the pantheon, because she's so—plain. Take her disavowal of Faulkner: "If it were possible to write like him," she said in 1976, "I wouldn't. I

disagree with him. I want everyone to understand what I'm getting at."

I want everyone to understand what I'm getting at. Who is wooed by this wish? An intriguing range of writers and reviewers. Larry McMurtry is a fan. To a lesser degree, so is Edward Hoagland. Francine du Plessix Gray and Michiko Kakutani have given Tyler glowing reviews. Her friend Eudora Welty once said, "If I could have written the last sentence in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, I'd have been happy for the rest of my life." The *Washington Post* book critic Jonathan Yardley—a fellow Baltimorean—was beside himself with adoration for *The Accidental Tourist*: It "cuts so close to the bone that it leaves one aching with pleasure and pain," he wrote. "Words fail me: one cannot reasonably expect fiction to be much better than this." Nick Hornby has called Tyler "my favorite writer, and the best line-and-length novelist in the world." That may be hyperbolic, but it's not unfathomable. When she hits her stride, Tyler is not only a wordsmith of sublime

control, she's a writer of astonishingly elastic imagination and empathy. One has only to think of the many other, near poisonous portraits of the repressed, such as Evan Connell's *Mr. Bridge* and *Mrs. Bridge*, to know that Tyler's art is brave and humane in the extreme.

Here is Macon Leary, for instance, the accidental tourist of the title: he writes business-travel guidebooks for those who would rather be home. Even before grief pinned him flat, Macon was emotionally parsimonious, a man so leery (his last name is apt) of life that he almost doesn't live it. (As literary kin, Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe, the bereft father of *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*, comes fastest to mind.) When speaking to the unconverted, I sometimes sputter, making excuses as I brandish a Tyler excerpt; she never dazzles or blinds us with her prose, à la Annie Proulx or David Foster Wallace. Instead the quiet accretion of her insights hits one in the chest. In the following passage Macon is on a business trip and looking for a cab in Paris, a task made

thorny because he threw his back out a few days earlier. He has just stopped taking painkillers, and his thoughts are thus coming clearer. Numbness (the metaphor is pointed) is no longer possible. A kindly teenage boy helps him hail a taxi.

[The boy] had a jaunty, stiff-legged way of walking that seemed familiar ... If Ethan hadn't died, Macon thought, wouldn't he have grown into such a person? ... And if dead people aged, wouldn't it be a comfort? To think of Ethan growing up in heaven—fourteen years old now instead of twelve—eased the grief a little. Oh, it was their immunity to time that made the dead so heartbreaking ... Macon gazed out the cab window, considering the notion in his mind. He felt a kind of inner rush, a racing forward. *The real adventure, he thought, is the flow of time; it's as much adventure as anyone could wish. And if he pictured Ethan still part of that flow—in some other place, however unreachable—he believed he might be able to bear it after all.*

To bear or not to bear, that is Tyler's question. As surely as Jane Austen's men and women are on tenterhooks about marriage and money, Tyler's are floored by grief and the bound condition of their hearts. Grief is her primary plot propellant, as reducible as arithmetic: 1. Someone dies. 2. Someone else must go on. 3. Can he or she? 4. Who will help?

This grief isn't always for the dead, however; it's sometimes for those who might as well be. Abandonment abounds in Tyler's world, offstage and on. (Intriguing that her late husband, who wrote in Persian, published a novel called *The Book of Absent People*.) The title character of *Searching for Caleb* walks right out of the stultifying Peck family, only to have his half-brother search for him some sixty years later. And then there's Beck Tull, the traveling-salesman father whose wife and three children reopen their wounds throughout *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*.

Which brings us to Tyler's newest novel, *Back When We Were Grownups*. This is not a non sequitur: Tyler likes to lace her novels with cross references, and the most significant one in *Grownups*, I think, is to *Dinner at the Homesick*

Restaurant. *Grownups*' main character, Rebecca Davitch, a fifty-something widow, mother, stepmother, and professional party planner, has an ominous nickname: Beck. One immediately thinks, *Homesick*'s Beck fled; will *Grownups*' Beck do the same? It doesn't help that disquiet shades the book's first sentence: "Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person."

Grownups hasn't much of a plot: Beck looks up her first boyfriend, they begin dating, and we watch them rather awkwardly (these sections have a nice, jagged authenticity) fall "in fond." Many parties are thrown; the extended family converges. Beck has a vivid dream that she has a blond son; her real-life daughters are all dark: is the dream a symbol of a parallel life, the one un-lived? Against all this interior tumble Beck extends her "unrelenting jollity," which both reassures and irritates her brood. The Davitches, you see, are a moody bunch. Two abandonments have seeped through the children's lives: their natural mother ran off to be a singer; their father (Joe, Beck's late husband) died young. When one stepdaughter wonders if Joe married Beck merely because he needed a mother for his kids, the query hurts until Beck works it through.

And while she had once believed that she'd been useful only in practical matters (tending the little girls, waiting on Mother Davitch), now she saw that her most valuable contribution had been her joyousness—a quality the Davitches sorely lacked. Not that she herself was joyous to begin with. No, she had had to labor at it. She had struggled to acquire it.

An admirable acquisition, such as it is. And I may be reading too much into this, but I couldn't help thinking there's a tint of self-portraiture (self-criticism?) in the passage—that it's not just about the ever optimistic Beck. I take my cue from the many times Tyler smudges Beck's rose-colored glasses, writing that Beck feels "compromised, ... a fraud" or is "stung" by waggish comments (one of her stepdaughters volleys the "unrelenting jollity" line). Tyler writes, "[Beck] often felt that her main function was keeping a party's sound level at a certain

lark, liting babble, even if it meant that she was forced to babble herself." Isn't that "babble" the problem in Tyler's work? Although *Grownups* avoids the vaudevillian traps of *Morgan's Passing* and *Breathing Lessons*, and the poignant but static defeatism of *Celestial Navigation* (1974) and *Ladder of Years* (1995), it still doesn't deliver. Its lightness isn't unpleasing, and its story isn't unaffecting. But Tyler's darker books insinuate themselves more deeply into one's heart. And since *Saint Maybe* we've had three "light" novels in a row. One craves the old heft.

Now, what to make of all this cross-referencing? It's not as if Tyler hasn't thrown in morsels for her vigilant readers before: Take Eli Everjohn, the idiosyncratic detective hired in both *Searching for Caleb* and *Saint Maybe*. Or how Pearl Tull, at a climactic, shimmering moment in *Homesick*, recalls hearing the Bedloe girl play piano off in the distance (Bedloe is the family's name in *Saint Maybe*). But *Grownups* is so awash in Tyleriana, so full of code, that it puts me in mind of sussing out the Ninas in all those Hirschfeld caricatures.

Just scan this quick list: Rebecca's uncle-in-law is given horehound drops for his hundredth birthday; those candies acted as a madeleine for a granddaughter and a grandfather in *Searching for Caleb*. There are cute store names: Budding Genius for a flower shop. Remember Rent-a-Back, from *A Patchwork Planet* (1998)? Characters relax by playing solitaire (an apt symbol), as they do in many of Tyler's books.

I could go on. It pains me to say this, but Tyler seems a little spent in *Grownups*; she leans on all the cross-referencing, and the language—her quiet, often pitch-perfect word choice—is prey to recycling as well. I remember being struck when she described, in *The Accidental Tourist*, "chips" of sky showing through Macon's wife's curly hair. I felt deflated when, in *Grownups*, I read "chips of blue sky showed behind the rooftops." Hardly a crime to use the right word twice, but still ... Perhaps, at this stage in her long career, Tyler simply finds herself drawn to airier subjects, airier treatments. No crime in that either.

But it's disconcerting, because there are hints that *Grownups* could have been a contender. Beck's sort-of beau, Will, for instance, is one of Tyler's more wrenching Maconesque creations. Where a perilously depressed Macon sews himself pita pockets of sheets (stitched together, they help with laundry efficiency), Will cooks himself the same batch of food every Sunday and eats a portion each night thereafter. A body bag for Macon, a joyless sameness for Will. (A passage in which he makes—a different!—dinner for Beck and his utterly unforgiving teenage daughter is real, and hard, and a slap in the face.) But the book's other characters, especially Beck's daughters, don't quite breathe on the page. Beck kindles our interest, yes, but too many of the story lines are wet flints, and the whole never quite ignites.

Case in point: That tantalizing Beck/Beck reference is made, and echoed, but never resolved. (If Rebecca abandons anything, it's her worry that she has lived the "wrong" life.) One even thinks that a dramatic twist beckons, because the book opens with a portentous picnic, at which the Davitches are celebrating the engagement of one of the daughters. This calls to mind another pivotal picnic scene, in *Homesick*, in which Pearl is hit by an arrow accidentally shot by one of her sons. It's a great passage, shocking and nuanced and just about perfect. Cody is the older brother, Ezra the younger, and Cody's life—now and forever—is shaped by fraternal jealousy, because he's convinced that Pearl loves Ezra best. Tyler wrote from Cody's perspective, as he aimed an arrow at Ezra.

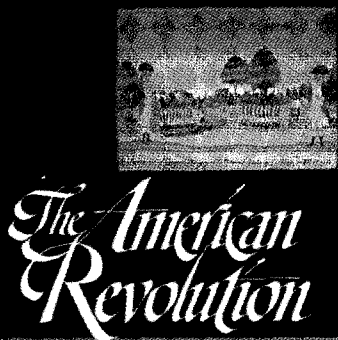
Ezra ran toward him, flapping his arms like an idiot and stammering. "Stop, stop, stop! No! Stop!" Did he really think Cody would shoot him? Cody stared, keeping the bow drawn. Ezra took a flying leap with his arms outstretched like a lover. He caught Cody in a kind of bear hug and slammed him flat on his back ... And meanwhile, what had happened to the arrow? It was minutes before he could struggle to a sitting position, elbowing Ezra off of him. He looked across the field and found his mother leaning on his father's arm, hobbling in his direction with a perfect circle of blood gleaming on the shoulder

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of her blouse. "Pearl, my God. Oh, Pearl," his father was saying. Cody turned and looked at Ezra, whose face was pale and shocked. "See there?" Cody asked him. "See what you've gone and done?"

"Did I do that?"

"Gone and done it to me again," Cody said, and he staggered to his feet and walked away.

So, if *Grownups*' picnic is ostensibly the place where Beck discovers "she had turned into the wrong person," what figurative arrow strikes her? As far as I can make out, it's "shot" by another son, in this case belonging to her step-daughter's fiancé. The boy's name is Peter, and he's a pale, forlorn child, much like Alexander, Muriel's seven-year-old in *The Accidental Tourist*. Peter falls into the river, partly because of Beck (she was trying to corral him to join the others). But then she fishes him out, and he's rattled but okay. The point being? I'm not sure. Somehow this immersion opens a wrinkle in time. And then, "brushing across her mind like the most delicate of moth wings," comes the dire thought "*How on earth did I get like this? How? How did I ever become this person who's not really me?*"

One Tyler scholar, Joseph C. Voelker, deconstructed the *Homesick* arrow scene as a play on Zeno's arrow of time, the paradox from Greek philosophy that pits two kinds of time, *chronos* and *kairos*, against each other. *Chronos* is linear, clock time; *kairos* is a sort of cosmic presentness. Cody's consuming jealousy makes him edgy, so he's always anticipating what's to come, never living in the here and now. Meanwhile, he scorns but envies, in Voelker's words, Ezra's "maddening ability to stay blind to the segmenting of moments, to slip inside any single one and take a nap with his cat."

This may all be a bit much: it's hard to picture Tyler the semiotician, poring over her Zeno to get the parallels just right. But even if the analogy is too ambitious by half, Voelker did hit on an element vital to her work: the magnetic pull of time gone by, the hopelessness of fixing it secure. Tyler may disavow any association with Faulkner, but his "The past is never dead. It's not even past" surely applies to her authorial view as well.

The vertigo of the long-ago: that's what rushes up and seizes Beck at the picnic—and she spends the remainder of the book trying to get her bearings, to trace how her past chuted her to this present. Along the way, I'm happy to report, there are prose moments to savor. Just before Peter falls into the river, for instance, Beck somehow eases into a sense of well-being.

Oh, didn't a river rest your eyes! She sank into a peaceful trance, watching how the water seemed to gather itself as it traveled toward a sharp bend. It swelled up in loose, silky tangles and then it smoothed and flowed on, transparent at the edges but nearly opaque at the center, as yellow-green and sunlit as a bottle in a window. She drifted with it, dreaming.

"Silky tangles." What a pluperfect sample of her style, the small, startling, but not overdone image that deepens the rest. Adjectives are kind to one another in Tyler's prose, never jostling, waiting their turn to speak. Through novel after novel, sentence after sentence, she gives us this undeniable strength, this alloy of proportion, momentum, color, and feeling. Tyler's books may sometimes be disappointing, but never her writing.

In one of his reviews Updike granted that Tyler had "one possible weakness: a tendency to leave the reader just where she found him." I think he meant that usually her characters' lives don't change, just their perspective. Tyler, in Updike's words, believes "the end of traveling is to return." He continues,

This is not untrue. Nothing Anne Tyler sets down is untrue. But the impending moral encloses the excitements of her story in a circle of safety that gives them the coziness of entertainment.

Now, Updike wrote all this in 1977, before Tyler's best (and least "cozy") books—*The Accidental Tourist*, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, and *Saint Maybe*—were published. Those books don't "leave the reader just where she found him" as much as some of her others. But both criticisms certainly apply to lots of her novels—especially

the Pulitzer-winning one. Indeed, that "coziness of entertainment" has prompted two Hallmark Hall of Fame productions, one of *Breathing Lessons* and one of *Saint Maybe*.

All right, then, ragged, dramatic change is not a prominent feature of Tyler's work. But she does use epiphany, sparsely, and that may be the next closest thing. I've mentioned Macon Leary's "inner rush" in the Paris cab. In one of Tyler's most justly famous scenes Pearl Tull comes across a transcendent passage from her girlhood diary. Macon's and Pearl's epiphanies reconstitute their lives enough to make those lives tolerable—the post-realization image Tyler uses in both instances is sunlight. For her, a spangle of light is the best we can expect. And maybe that's enough.

"I don't think most people are capable of [change]," Tyler told an interviewer in 1972. What informs this belief? Trust me, you won't find out with the help of Charlie Rose, or Terry Gross, or the manager of your local Barnes & Noble megastore. Tyler doesn't do author tours. She doesn't teach and she doesn't lecture. And she seldom does spoken interviews, though she occasionally, politely, responds to questions in writing. Tyler is no Thomas Pynchon or J. D. Salinger (she has written scores of book reviews, for instance), but she is reclusive. She admits that she and Jeremy Pauling, *Celestial Navigation*'s collage artist and full-blown agoraphobic, are "more alike than anyone knew."

A snapshot biography: The oldest of four, Tyler moved around frequently as her parents settled in a half dozen secluded Quaker blessed communities. Her father was a chemist, her mother a social worker. She was mostly homeschooled; there weren't many other children around. It seems fair to ascribe her astute portraits of older people to the prevalence of elders in her life. *Grownups*, for instance, offers up Poppy, Beck's uncle-in-law, voluble, stooped, and as "light as milkweed." And her portrait of the dying Pearl Tull in *Homesick* rings with truthness.

Tyler attended public school for the first time at the age of eleven, in North Carolina. Schoolmates were fascinated that she had never before used a phone.

In one of her interviews she said that this enfolded upbringing made her view “the normal world with a certain amount of distance and surprise, which can sometimes be helpful to a writer.” In high school Tyler planned on being an artist; she is said to sketch doodles of her characters before she writes her novels. After studying with Reynolds Price at Duke, she did graduate work in Russian studies at Columbia (in *Searching for Caleb* one character’s world turns upside down when he reads Dostoevski). Her debut novel came out in 1964. And her career got its first big boost when Gail Godwin praised *Celestial Navigation* in *The New York Times Book Review*. Since 1967 she has lived in Baltimore, and most of her novels are rooted there.

I sometimes sputter, making excuses as I brandish a Tyler excerpt; she never dazzles or blinds us with her prose. Instead the quiet accretion of her insights hits one in the chest.

Who have her detractors been since then? James Wolcott seems plain bored by Tyler’s work. Diane Johnson doesn’t like the fact that her brand of bitter-sweet tastes more sweet than bitter. Johnson berated *The Accidental Tourist* for being a “Reaganesque dream novel,” because it “urge[s] a whole agenda of comforting, consoling ideas” that are “powerfully attractive.” She continued, “It’s just that they are not true.” Vivian Gornick, in her *Village Voice* review of *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, conceded Tyler’s great talent but indicted her for what Gornick considers nothing less than a paralyzing immaturity. She wrote,

Anne Tyler is held spellbound before the hopeless loss of childhood her characters refuse to accept. She feels the dull pain of that lifelong desire for the normal family no one ever had, understands the psychic bondage in

which people far into middle age are held. But Tyler mythicizes the inability to give up the family, and because she does her novels do not achieve depth.

I read this passage over and over, feeling ill and traitorous as I wondered if I agreed. Then I pushed on to the end of Gornick’s screed.

Ironically, [Tyler] is beloved precisely because her writing skill invests the ordinary infantilism of American family life with a tender glamour. She allows the middle-brow middle class to love itself for all its poignant insufficiency.

Excuse me? Does anyone else find this last line unforgivably smug? So patronizing that it discolors—maybe discredits, too—all that came before? Gornick’s blunt criticism epitomizes the attitude that may be keeping Tyler from vaulting to the critical heights she deserves, Updike or no Updike.

In short, it’s a class thing. Not lower class or upper class but wrong class. Tyler doesn’t write yuppie fiction or proletariat fiction or confessional fiction. Her characters aren’t hip. They struggle, but out of earshot. They are the last people one would see on talk shows, the last people who would go into therapy—no matter how much they might need it. Some of us know such people very well, and to see them explained, even a little, in American literature makes us glad. There’s something (I’ll just say it) so wonderfully Quaker about Anne Tyler’s work, her beautiful but muslin prose, her profound tolerance for her characters, the small-*d* democracy of her vantage point. As Edward Hoagland said, in a review of *Breathing Lessons*, she is someone “you would want on your jury if you ever had to stand trial.”

Decades ago the author discussed in an interview what sorts of characters were missing from northern fiction: “There aren’t enough quiet, gentle, basically good people in a novel,” she answered. There are in Anne Tyler’s fiction, though. And despite her shortcomings (which I’m almost loath to admit, because I do love some of her work so very much), this is a tremendous gift. Because no one cares more enduringly about those who, in the end, endure. ▀

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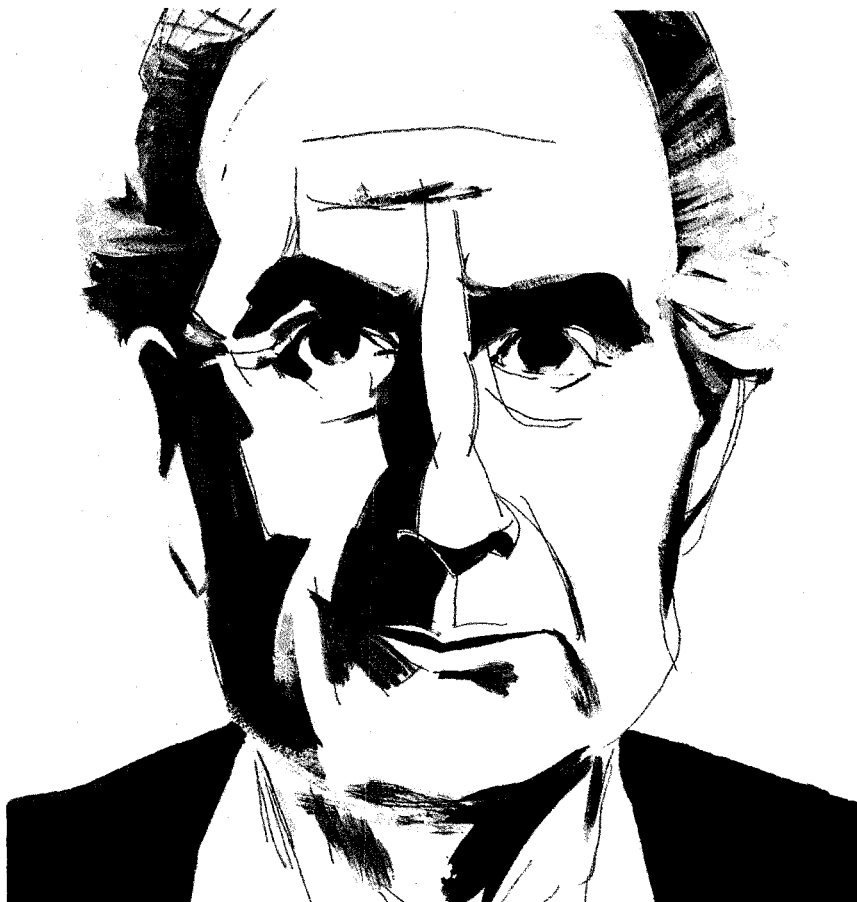


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BOOKS

THE NIHILIST

Philip Roth's hard, isolate—and heroic—vision

BY JASON COWLEY

.....

In 1994 the London *Sunday Times* asked leading, mostly British writers to name the world's premier English-language novelist. The response—from Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, and others—was entirely predictable, in that Saul Bellow and John Updike easily got the most nods. For years they and Philip Roth would have formed a triumvirate among critics, but Roth pulled up the rear, earning only three mentions. It was thought that Roth had become an unhappy parody of himself, a writer of mechanical certainties who, in his novel *Operation Shylock* (1993), an extremely funny exploration of doubleness and the disintegrating self, had turned his obsession with the slippage between autobiography and fiction, between the real

and the imagined, into a programmatic poetics of romantic despair. Roth, it seemed, had no other subject than himself—and how bored we were by the trajectory of his life, by his frustrations with his father, by his ambivalence about his Jewishness and his sexual delinquency, by his feeble protestations that *Operation Shylock*, with its Mossad spies and avenging double called Philip Roth, was not fiction but the truth, that it all happened. You bet, Philip, one wanted to say, you bet.

If the same poll were taken today, however, it is difficult to imagine that Roth would not finish right at the top, because something happened to him in the mid-1990s, something unprecedented in modern letters: he began, in his seventh

decade, when most of his peers had resignedly entered the long twilight of their careers, to get better. He began to write better books. His *best* books. In retrospect it seemed that with the publication of *Shylock*, Roth had reached a kind of terminus—the end of the beginning, as it were. He could go on only by going backward, to a time when he wrote less about himself than about other people. Freed from the tyranny of the self, he would be able again to grapple with American modernity.

Reading Roth's recent trilogy of novels about postwar American society—*American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000)—and *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) before that, one senses that here is a writer who, even at the age of sixty-eight, burns to invent. (A May, 2000, *New Yorker* profile described how the now reclusive Roth, because of a bad back, works standing up at a lectern, writing all day, into the evening, and sometimes in the middle of the night.) As a result his fiction has a peculiar contemporary resonance, an existential frenzy of the kind once familiar from the work of, say, Dostoevski, Conrad, or Céline, but which has largely disappeared from the Anglo-American novel, if it was ever there. So the more one reads of late Roth, the more one is convinced that he is writing against extinction, that he works to the sound of death panting behind him, feels its cankerous breath on his neck. And what death-haunted work he was producing so late in the day, so late in the past century!

The Dying Animal—like *Sabbath's Theater* and *American Pastoral*—is soaked in death and illness, in the sense of an imminent ending. It is narrated by David Kepesh, a worldly, callous, libertine cultural critic and lecturer at a New York college whom we last encountered in *The Professor of Desire* (1977), when, on a trip to Prague, he dreamed he met the whore who once slept with Franz Kafka. In the parable-like *The Breast* (1972) we had watched in bewilderment as Kepesh mutated, in a neat Kafkaesque joke, into a gigantic breast, and found himself hospitalized and helpless, a fairground curiosity, a specimen for display, an exhibit, a freak. And possibly a madman, too.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

THE DYING ANIMAL
by Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin
176 pages, \$22.00

Now, in this new novel, he has fallen in love with ... well, a breast—or a pair of breasts, to be precise. They belong to one of his students, a wealthy, charming Cuban-American named Consuela Castillo, whose thrilling desirability enchants, infatuates, and torments Kepesh.

The *Professor of Desire* was constructed as a lengthy speech, and this novel can similarly be read as a dramatic monologue or a long retrospective, unfurling in a crisis of self-revelation. As in Albert Camus's *The Fall*, another work of intimate confession, we never meet the protagonist's unnamed interlocutor, if he or she exists at all, who occupies the shadowy margins of the text. Here that interlocutor speaks only at the end, to inform Kepesh that he, like the book we have just read, is "finished."

The book opens eight years after his affair with Consuela began, and we quickly understand that Kepesh has been humbled and wounded by the experience, that he thinks about this woman, whom he no longer sees, continually and desperately. He often masturbates to the memory of her body. "The longing never disappeared even while I had her. The primary emotion, as I've said, was longing. It's still longing. There's no relief from the longing and my sense of myself as a supplicant."

Consuela is a big woman, "a masterpiece of *volupté*." "She has a D cup," Kepesh says, "this duchess, really big, beautiful breasts, and skin of a very white color, skin that, the moment you see it, makes you want to lick it." (It is odd that even when extolling these breasts, Kepesh never pauses to recall that he, at least in his fantasies, was once a living and breathing breast.)

Consuela and Kepesh's relationship is, as one would expect in Roth, intensely sexual. (And, as ever, Roth bathes in a steady flow of bodily fluids.) Kepesh is a product of sixties rebellion: long ago he renounced any pretense of living what he sees as a conventional life—one constrained by monogamy and routine relationships. He is used to sleeping with his students and with any number of other women. He really is the man who loved women—hundreds of women, in an infinite variety of ways. His

ANSWERS TO THE APRIL PUZZLER

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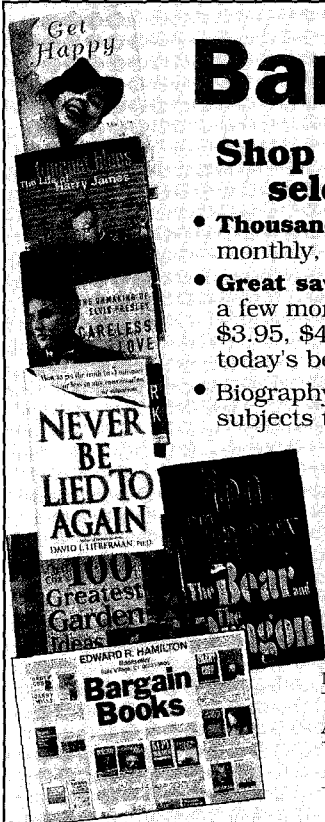
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friend George is similarly licentious; they pedantically dissect Kepesh's relationship with Consuela, muttering puerile mantras: "He who forms a tie is lost, attachment is my enemy."

But Kepesh's relationship with Consuela is different. For one thing, he is driven mad by jealousy of her extreme youth and the boyfriends she has had—and will have in the future, when he, aged and shrunken, an ephemeral star of the microphone, a mere book reviewer and cultural talking head, will be so much dust. It is death that gives this novel its remarkable charge and compulsion, and its devastating denouement.

At times, listening to the seventy-year-old Kepesh as he struggles to live under what he perceives as a sentence of death, one is reminded of Ferdinand Bardamu, the narrator of Céline's great nihilistic novel *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932). The engine of Céline's fiction is an irrational misanthropy. Ferdinand rails against mass society and the instincts of the herd, against what industrialization and democracy have done to the contemporary soul, and then crowns himself with laughter, because he knows that without laughter, without his fabulous contempt, he is nothing: "Death is chasing you, you've got to hurry, and while you're looking you've got to eat, and keep away from wars. That's a lot of things to do. It's no picnic."

Sex does for Kepesh what laughter does for Ferdinand: it is his protective shield, enabling him to survive, to affirm his solitude, to live under extremes of isolation and threat. But it is not enough, because something awful and unexpected—if fictionally overdetermined and schematic—is lying in wait for him. On New Year's Eve, 1999, he is alone at home, playing the piano and generally trying to avoid the great non-event of the millennium, when he receives a call from Consuela, to whom he has not spoken in years. The answering machine picks up, and he listens to her message. She has some news, something she wants to tell him.

He calls her back and learns that she is in the neighborhood; she comes immediately to his apartment. But something about her has changed. Why is she wearing a fezlike hat? Then she tells

him: she has breast cancer, and there is a good chance that she might die. Kepesh is destroyed; in a scene of cruel comedy he can think of nothing but the ruination of her breasts, which she asks him to photograph before her operation. After he has taken about thirty pictures, they curl up together on the sofa to watch the millennial celebrations all over the world, she naked except for her hat, and he full of tortured desires. The festivities in Havana come on the television, and she begins to speak about the Cuba she has never known and will never know, her imaginary homeland, which exists for her only in photographs, narrative fragments, and half-remembered family recollections. Then she removes her hat, and the extent of her plight becomes apparent.

The scene is marvelously controlled. In hard, driving, unsentimental sentences, and with superb dialogue, Roth shows us Kepesh as we have never before seen him, a man enraptured, at last, not by himself but by the struggles of another person, no longer monstrously in thrall to a rampant sexual egoism. We see a changed man, perhaps a better man. But it is too late. To adapt Kafka, there is infinite hope but not for him.

What are we to make of Philip Roth's astounding productivity, his relentless will to create? In 1960, not long into his writing life, he marveled at the fantastic nature of contemporary reality.

The American writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make *credible* much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.

Through a long, difficult career, tainted by hypercelebrity and accusations of misogyny, Roth has remained true to his youthful vision, to his mission of documenting the defining particulars of his age in fiction, of submerging himself in waves of contemporary reality, of covering the world in language. No other living American writer—not the fancily

overwriting Bellow, with his demented epistoler anti-hero Herzog; not Updike, with his family of Rabbits and their hick everyman musings; not Don DeLillo, with his cast of paranoids—has created characters quite as memorable or as alive as Nathan Zuckerman and David Kepesh, or endowed the modern novel with such philosophical urgency, making us think that fiction still matters.

There is a reason for this, I think. Updike's vision of the world is essentially benign; he is a professional writer, prolific, comfortable with his talent and with American affluence, seemingly selecting his subjects with the insouciance of a child—what will it be today, the court of Hamlet or miscegenation in Brazil? He is also a believer in God, so he has his consolation. Bellow, though agnostic, unfashionably believes in the soul; to him, empirical reality is all we can know but not all there is. This other reality is always sending us hints that we cannot receive without art. As for DeLillo, if he believes in anything, it is the power of conspiracies, the mysterious networks and covert connections that shape our lives.

But Philip Roth believes in nothing except the world of his fiction. He is fearlessly beholden to no one. He is a hard nihilist. All political schemes to remake the world, he seems to be saying in recent novels, are doomed to failure. His fictional alter egos, his tortured, superfluous men, are resolutely earthbound, never lifting their heads to look at the stars as they muse on the futility of ambition in the face of certain annihilation. Their only respite is found in a kind of intense erotic abandon, a willful succumbing to preposterous desires—and, as David Kepesh puts it, to the hope generated by the relentless "stupidity of being oneself," to the "unavoidable comedy of being anyone at all."

But poor Kepesh is left at the end of this very strange and poignant novel without even the small consolation of hope. He is left, in fact, holding in his hands the diseased breast of the woman he once loved and longed to possess, a woman who, at the age of thirty-two, may soon be nothing and nobody at all. She could be gone—and before he is. That, for Kepesh, is the final indignity, the bleakest truth of all. ▀

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

Save money—quit your job; Theroux's Honolulu; a sensuous debut novel

.....

This affectionate and astute study of the beguiling cinematic comedienness of the 1930s and 1940s—Jean Arthur, Carole Lombard, Myrna Loy, and Rosalind Russell, among others—celebrates and assesses their use of the American language. It's hard to believe in the age of *Titanic*, but the highest achievement of American film is its exhilarating, intricate, often slangy dialogue. And no players were given better or breezier scripts, or interpreted them with more verve and precision, than these women, from whom, Maria DiBattista writes, "I came to experience the pleasure to be had in words." Clearly, these "fast-talking dames" helped to give American cinema what Edmund Wilson complained at the time was lacking in American theater: "a language of the quick intelligence." DiBattista makes a convincing case that their smarts, wit, and irony offer an "—to use a much used but in this instance indispensable



FAST-TALKING
DAMES

by Maria DiBattista
Yale, 336 pages,
\$27.95

word—empowering model for American womanhood." (It's depressing that in these liberated times the jejune Gwyneth Paltrow is believed to bring great intelligence to the screen—but then again, the gulf between Paltrow and, say, Katharine Hepburn is no greater than that separating those sometimes snide but never witty Harvard boys Matt Damon and Ben Affleck from William Powell and Cary Grant.) To be sure, DiBattista, an English professor at Princeton, occasionally lapses into cultural-studies silliness, and she makes at least one small but striking error (in *Some Like It Hot*, Marilyn Monroe's walk is described as "Jell-O on springs," not wheels). Nevertheless, she writes with authority and perspicacity ("Although technically a blonde, Jean Arthur is a brunette at heart"). This is a smart book about very smart women. —BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

For many middle-class couples a second income is an expensive proposition. Obviously, there are the hefty payouts to both the hungry tax man and the kindly immigrant lady who minds their children while dreaming about her own. Then there's the high cost of outsourcing all the grunt work that those cheesed-off, Valium-popping sisters of yesteryear got conned into doing: cooking seven hot dinners a week, ironing their husbands' button-downs, and mending almost serviceable socks. We've had a revolution, of course, and here are the spoils: a woman's inalienable right to put in a full day at the office and then grab hot handfuls of twenties out of the ATM so that she can load Happy Meals and dry-cleaned shirts and a dozen brand-new pairs of tube socks into the SUV during the blind exhaustion of extra-work hours. In *How to Raise a Family on Less Than Two Incomes*, Denise Topolnicki, a former editor of *Money* magazine, blows the whistle on this false economy, explaining in careful detail how families can perform a thoroughgoing financial overhaul, using such time-honored strategies as wrestling down credit-card debt, contributing to a tax-deferred retirement plan, and refinancing the mortgage. For many, she asserts, the goal of having one parent stay at home with the children is well within reach. The soundness and practicality of Topolnicki's suggestions, along with her obvious command of her field, are impressive, and any couple considering dropping down to a single income would be well advised to read this book—right after they brew a very, very strong pot of coffee. The book is filled with so many specific financial equations—couched in homey, narrative terms—that it seems to have been care-



HOW TO RAISE
A FAMILY ON
LESS THAN TWO
INCOMES

by Denise
Topolnicki
Broadway Books
351 pages, \$12.95

fully calibrated to delight those readers nurturing a wan nostalgia for fifth-grade math ("How much of their seemingly comfortable \$70,000 income do Andy and Anna have left after they pay Uncle Sam, the day care center, and the bus company?"). Things become markedly less useful whenever Topolnicki veers too far from taxes, savings plans, and investments. A lengthy description of her personal approach to weekly grocery shopping, an operation only slightly less complicated than the invasion of Normandy, may be of small help to many householders. It may be true that Colonial Williamsburg is a better bargain than Disney World, but if anybody's selling tickets to the family conference at which the little tykes are apprised of the switcheroo, I'll buy one. (And if there's a seven-year-old who would genuinely rather "watch a woodworker craft a highboy" than ride Space Mountain, shouldn't he be left home to bring the Quicken spreadsheets up to date?) Still, the business of Topolnicki's book is important: challenging two-income couples to think carefully about how they spend their time and their money and their fleeting tenure as the parents of young children. —CAITLIN FLANAGAN

Although Paul Theroux's latest book bills itself as a novel, it proves to be another example of the self-reflexive whimsy that has come to dominate the author's work. The Theroux titles *My Secret History* and *My Other Life* could have served just as well for this effort, in which a fifty-something novelist (whose career bears a distinct resemblance to a certain Paul Theroux's) moves to Hawaii, where he abandons writing for a job as a hotel manager. In a narrative as laid-back as a riff of slack-key guitar, he marries the daughter of the in-house hooker and spends his days dealing with bumptious guests, enigmatic employees, and his larger-than-life boss, Buddy Hamstra.

The writing is at its best when Theroux is sketching a side of Hawaii that



HOTEL
HONOLULU

by Paul Theroux
Houghton Mifflin
432 pages, \$26.00

tourists might see but never understand—the service-industry workers and expatriate landowners who try to find some sort of permanence in this most temporary of states. The book brims with eccentric characters and their wild, usually morbid tales. Philandering honey-mooners, priapic Japanese businessmen, a shoe fetishist, and a 650-pound pop star make raucous cameo appearances, but it is the characters that hang around, such as a mail-order Filipina bride, a venomous journalist known as Madam Ma, and the bibulous Buddy, who linger in the reader's imagination.

Theroux is less successful with his narrator, whose voice is merely a half-hearted attempt at exploring the sort of literary counterlife that so interests the author. The reluctant manager remains too anemic a presence to unite the novel in a coherent fictional scheme; the demons that keep him from writing are never satisfactorily conjured. His wife, Sweetie, who is supposedly the illegitimate daughter of JFK, and their wild child, Rose, are querulous and underdeveloped in comparison with the other residents. Theroux would have been wiser to check himself out of *Hotel Honolulu* and let it become the short-story collection it clearly longs to be. —STEPHEN AMIDON

Luscious and heartrending, although somewhat insubstantial, this slim first novel with a hellish setting, Belgium under Nazi occupation, overflows with miracles. A child's heart rises from her chest in the shape of the Star of David; a dead father embraces his daughter and teaches her to make chocolate; a postulant leads a family from an air-raid



IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS
by N. M. Kelby
Hyperion/Theia
164 pages, \$21.00

shelter before the shelter is destroyed by a bomb. The story begins in March of 1941, in France. A little Jewish girl is helping her grandmother save her prized hybrid bulbs when their village is bombed. From that moment, heaven begins to twine with earth, until it is impossible to say what is divinity and what is madness; who is an angel and who is not. Two nuns res-

cue the girl from a cellar by luring her out with chocolate—"the one thing the angels said they could not get in heaven"—and take her with them over the Belgian border to their convent in Tournai, a town that once boasted "sightings of God" "as common as air," but from whence, since the occupation, he seems to have slipped away.

In some ways *In the Company of Angels*, which is really a novella, suffers from its brevity. N. M. Kelby packs her book with monumental themes—death, betrayal both grand and personal, familial and romantic love, faith, the existence of God—but doesn't give herself room to do more than brush against most of them. Complex and conflicting relationships abound, but in most cases we have to take her word for their intensity; Kelby devotes little space to their development. At heart, however, this is a fable, and as such, it benefits from Kelby's fleeting touch, which enhances the whimsical and the miraculous. Above all, the writing, as sensuous as the chocolate that pervades Kelby's story, makes this well worth reading. —CHRISTINA SCHWARZ

This collection of three novellas (*April, May, and June*) is the second volume in Maureen Howard's projected quartet of books arranged around the seasons. The first was a novel, *A Lover's Almanac*, whose heroes, Artie Freeman and Louise Moffett, make a small and moving appearance in one of the new tales. Otherwise the volumes are related only by themes—nature, art, seasonal return, generational legacies, the condition of women. And whereas *A Lover's Almanac* was described by some critics as postmodern in its stylistic choices, *Big as Life* is closer to a classic modernism, with Howard delivering a painterly prose that relies more on texture and sensation than on straight narrative.

The first tale is framed by the image of an ornamental pond of carp—"natural, by design so natural"—and the imperative to "imagine." It traces the attenuation

of a dynasty from dying interwar patriarch to millennial female inheritor while describing the diverse and difficult lives of the women of the family throughout the century and also those of an eighteenth-century proto-feminist and her black female servant. The second tale balances innocence against violence, convention against faith, religious fervor against secular devotion, and is similarly focused on women's vulnerability and resourceful strength. The last tale looks at the life and work of the artist and naturalist John James Audubon, through the fading eyes of his long-suffering wife. This story forms a triptych with that of Artie (struggling mathematician) and Louise (struggling artist), and with an account of Howard's own (rather dull) experiences of flora and fauna during a predominantly urban upbringing.

Throughout, and especially in the last tale, the tensions between art and realism that engender the book's title are themselves artistically rendered. The academic sources from which historical figures are disinterred, and the imaginative process by which they are revived in art, are offered concurrently. Although Howard's style can be too elliptical for its own good (a fault that sometimes extends to her dialogue and that produces the odd *longueur*), it just as often succeeds in gorgeously evoking the movement of lives and minds and emotions. Howard cites Thoreau during her own literary explorations of nature, and seems both to draw from him and to argue with him. This is a quiet and contemplative book of subtlety and grace, passion and commitment. —ROBERT POTTS



**BIG AS LIFE:
THREE TALES FOR
SPRING**
by Maureen
Howard
Viking, 240 pages,
\$23.95

Recent books by *Atlantic* authors:

Colossus: How the Corporation Changed America by Jack Beatty. Broadway Books, 528 pages, \$30.00. Jack Beatty is a senior editor of *The Atlantic*.

The Holocaust on Trial: History, Justice, and the David Irving Libel Case by D. D. Guttenplan. Norton, 224 pages, \$23.95. This book grew out of the author's February, 2000, cover story for *The Atlantic*.

River Town by Peter Hessler. HarperCollins, 402 pages, \$26.00. Peter Hessler's article "Tibet Through Chinese Eyes" appeared in the February, 1999, *Atlantic*.

BRON AND HIS "AFFEC. PAPA"

Auberon Waugh, the acerbic British man of letters, died in January. Our author remembers him and reflects on Waugh's complex, heartbreaking relationship with his father, Evelyn

BY GEOFFREY WHEATCROFT

.....

We didn't look like the coterie we had been called, if only because there were so many of us. On a wet winter's day several hundred people packed into St. Mary the Virgin, the beautiful pink-stone parish church of Bishops Lydeard, in West Somerset, to say good-bye to our friend Auberon Waugh. After the funeral we saw him buried in his own village of Combe Florey, whose church would have been much too small for us all. And then we crossed the road to his house for a last gathering, old and young, rich and poor, smart and dowdy, left and right, high and low, united by nothing but sorrow and affection.

For years "Bron" Waugh had been the most violently controversial English journalist of his age, and controversy followed him to the grave. Some of the London papers gave him the treatment usually reserved for Presidents or Nobel-winning poets. The conservative *Daily Telegraph* gave his death five pages; even the liberal *Guardian* had two pages, one an unusually long obituary (by me, as it happens). What with claims that Waugh was a genius, or the Swift of his age, maybe the eulogies were a touch overdone. They certainly produced an explosive reaction.

The next day the *Guardian* ran another piece, of most unusual invective. Defying the convention that death is a time for bland pieties, Polly Toynbee told her readers that Waugh had been a "ghastly man" at the center of "a coterie of reactionary fogeys." "Effete, drunken, snobbish, sneering, racist and sexist, they spit poison at anyone vulgar enough to want to improve anything at all." This effusion was answered by several journalists, among them Francis Wheen and William Shawcross in the *Guardian*. In its



Sunday sister paper, the *Observer*, Lynn Barber wrote that the idea of Waugh as the head of some right-wing cabal was risible, and added that of course "you needed a sense of humour to appreciate him which is why Toynbee drew a blank."

But enough. I really cannot expect *Atlantic* readers to follow these intestine Fleet Street squawks and squabbles, which exhaust even those of us involved. Who was the man who could inspire that kind of affection, and that kind of rage? Well, Auberon Alexander Waugh was born in November of 1939, the second of Evelyn and Laura Waugh's six children and their first son. His parentage was the key to his life, obviously enough, though not in an obvious way. Bron was brought up in the west of England, amid a growing herd of his siblings and his mother's cousins, and barely saw his father for several years after Evelyn set off for the war, on what proved a bitter pilgrimage. Barely was Evelyn home than Bron was sent away to school. He was a rebellious little boy, and as a teenager he tried to get away from school. Before university he did National Service, as our draft was called in the fifteen postwar years it lasted. Despite loathing the bull and the brutality of army training, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant, or cornet, into the Royal Horse Guards, "the Blues." During the war Evelyn had joined the Royal Marines, admirable but unfashionable, and had later transferred into the Blues, the social pinnacle, though he never saw action with that illustrious regiment. The eighteen-year-old Bron was sent to Cyprus when it was in the throes of violent conflict with Greek nationalists, all part of the melancholy, long, withdrawing roar of empire. Eve-

lyn cynically reported that Bron "goes to Cyprus to be stoned by school-girls," but then that "Cornet Waugh is enjoying Cyprus top-hole."

One day in June of 1958 Bron was annoyed by a fault in the machine gun of his armored car, grasped it by the muzzle, and shook it. He realized that this was a mistake after it had fired six rounds through him at point-blank range. Years later this inspired one of his funniest pieces. He had heard various accounts of this mishap, he said, such as that he had been shot by his own men or that he had shot off his testicles. In reality he had lost a lung, several ribs, a finger, and his spleen, "but nothing else." He was very lucky to survive, and for the rest of his life was in ill health, not to say more pain than most of us realized. His death, at sixty-one, came after his liver had nearly packed up and his heart finally did, but those machine-gun bullets hadn't helped.

After recovering from his grave wounds he went to Oxford but was restless; he left after a year and began working as a journalist. He was an energetic young man, publishing a novel at twenty and marrying at twenty-one (on the day Princess Diana was born, he often reminded us). Before he was thirty he had four children, had written for several papers, and had published four novels. I met him in 1971, during my brief and inglorious career in book publishing, when I edited (after a fashion) his fifth and last novel. At least one of his novels is worth reading if you can get hold of it. *Consider the Lilies* (1968) is a clever and amusing book about an emotionally detached parson and his awful wife. But even that is good rather than very good, and Bron wisely gave up fiction. Of course, there was that shadow. It is hard trying to write operas if you're called Siegfried Wagner, or trying to write novels if you're called Auberon Waugh. It was in the following decade, his thirties, that Bron found himself and escaped from his father's shadow. He wrote at one time or another for various daily papers, but I thought that he really came off only in magazines with smaller circulations, where his combination of smartness, ferocious wit, and outrageous saying-the-unsayable

flourished. Although it's tempting to claim that the phenomenon of Bron Waugh is inexplicable to Americans, it would not be quite true. To be sure, as part of his highly individual world view, he affected an increasingly vehement anti-Americanism, partly inherited from his father but exacerbated by hatred of Hollywood, the Pentagon, McDonald's, and *The New York Times*, and then by American indifference to him and his works. This was the one subject about which he was boring, complaining volubly that no American publisher had taken his memoirs. When the indefatigably Anglophile Carroll & Graft finally did bring them out, several years late, that silenced his complaints for a while.

What some Americans liked in him was indirectly described once by Michael Kinsley:

The bitter wit of *Private Eye*, Britain's satire and gossip magazine that makes American journalism seem paralyzed by gentility, and the jaunty undertones of self-mockery and unseriousness that run through the *Spectator*, Britain's leading political and literary journal, are products of a decadent civilization that I find irresistible.

Those were precisely the two magazines in which Bron Waugh took wing, bitter, witty, jaunty, and seriously unserious. In 1975 Alexander Chancellor became the editor of the *Spectator* and took Waugh out to lunch to ask his advice. (It included the advice to hire me, who had just been fired from my last job in book publishing. I never knew this until Chancellor told me the day after Bron died. I mention it now not out of solipsism but because I am one of many people with reason to be grateful to Bron.) Then Bron started writing a dazzling weekly column for *The Spectator*, "Another Voice." A collection of these columns was published in 1986 with the subtitle "An Alternative Anatomy of Britain," and "alternative" was almost an understatement.

His *Spectator* columns were dashing, slashing, and sometimes startlingly offensive. He could be very wounding, and although it would be silly to rebuke him for "going too far" (one might as well accuse Shakespeare of iambic pentameters), there was something equally silly about the pretense that it was all a game and nobody should mind. But

his *Private Eye* "Diary" was more than offensive or even funny; it was an extraordinary and surreal satire, looking at "real" life through a prism of fantasy and exaggeration and near craziness in a way that (however much the idea would have displeased Bron) was almost Nabokovian or postmodern.

All his journalism, parodic or straight, reflected the world from a unique angle. So he would congratulate the Khmer Rouge on its "policy of executing the wives of politicians in the previous regime, as well as the politicians themselves," and commend the same practice to England. That was in 1975, in *Private Eye*. Three years ago, when all of America was in a pother about the "be-smirching" that had taken place in the Oval Office, Bron gave his simple verdict, in an op-ed column, that "Bill Clinton's sexual recklessness is [his] only likeable characteristic" (in the year of Rich and Rodham, I'm not sure that seems such a bad judgment). He was completely distinctive, contrarian, unpredictable, outside any party label. Bron was called a snob, and since he mocked the lower classes with all their horrible tastes and habits, it would be a waste of time defending him on the charge. All the same, I think that he was less a snob than a class warrior, or a doughty battler in the culture wars. If he had had a motto, it might have been "The *Class* war will find me on the side of the educated *bourgeoisie*"—not Auberon Alexander Waugh but John Maynard Keynes in 1925.

His enemies never grasped just how *idiosyncratic* he was. When he was young he had played the ultra-reactionary, or high Tory, and "played" was the word. But that simply didn't describe him later. What Bron wrote of his father was true of himself: he was "far closer to the Manchester School anarchists than to the Conservative right wing." He was indeed less of a traditionalist or imperialist than a radical or ultra-libertarian, hating all forms of state intervention at home and abroad. As long ago as 1938 Evelyn Waugh dismissed "the distinctions of Left and Right which are now becoming as meaningless and mischievous as the circus colours of the Byzantine Empire," and this view was also exemplified

by Bron. Polly Toynbee, in her screech against "reactionary ... do-nothing conservatism ... idle unwillingness to engage with any politician's attempt to make life better for anyone else," failed to see that his frivolity was serious. Bron shared Samuel Johnson's view that most schemes of political improvement are very laughable things; except that in the twentieth century too many schemes of improvement weren't laughable at all but led to the deaths of innocent millions.

At heart Bron hated every kind of overweening authority, from schoolmasters to sergeants major to politicians, from totalitarianism to militarism to the bossy Fabian managerialism that tells us how to live our lives. At home he railed against the police, and he loathed "punishment freaks," especially those who supported the death penalty. Abroad he was a "pacifist," fiercely critical of the Falklands and Gulf Wars and contemptuous of the campaign two years ago to bomb Serbia back into the Stone Age. The leftist journalist Neil Clark has written in the *New Statesman* of the exhilaration he and some colleagues felt, cooped up in Budapest in the spring of 1999 as the B-52s roared overhead toward Belgrade, when they read Waugh's denunciations of the whole enterprise, which called the bombing an "atrocious" supported by "lying propaganda," and suggested that Tony Blair and his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, should be arrested as war criminals. Perry Anderson, of the *New Left Review*, could have been thinking of Bron Waugh when he wrote, "The most devastating criticisms of the expansion of NATO and the war in the Balkans often came from the Right."

As I have suggested, his relationship with his father was central to Bron's life, but this was no ordinary case either of filial love or of Oedipal reaction. One of the first things by Bron I can remember reading was in *The Spectator* in May of 1966, shortly after Evelyn's death. It was a bitter attack on those who had sneered at his father, an astonishingly poised performance for a twenty-six-year-old, and an early demonstration of Bron's gift for vituperation: "fatuously uninformed judgments ... the jackals snarling and whining ..."

For years afterward Bron kept up this role of his father's champion. But then a slow, perceptible change began. Ten years after Evelyn died, his *Diaries* was published, and Bron reviewed it. He was obviously irritated by the "monotonous succession of unrelated episodes of drunkenness and sodomy," as well as by the social ambition and the self-loathing. Between the lines—as I suspected then, and see more clearly than ever now—he was coming to terms with his real feelings about his father. In the earlier parts of his father's diaries, Bron wrote, "there is also discernible ... (it cannot be denied) a certain crude snobbery." Later Evelyn was "a family man, *albeit a reluctant one*."

His children make various short appearances, nearly always in some opprobrious context, but it would need an exceptionally astute reader to divine the true extent of *the burden they were on him* ... Growing children are seldom very elegant, amusing or smart, and I think it was this vulgarity he resented most. It is not a usual thing for a man to decide *against his own children for snobbish reasons*, but it was an *undeni-*

ably awkward aspect of the parent-child relationship in his case that he was liable to decide against any of his children at any moment on these grounds, *and frequently did so* [emphasis added].

It is quite true that the *Diaries* and the *Letters* and the successive biographies of Evelyn Waugh are peppered with the hidden injuries of class. At his father's death Bron claimed disingenuously that "he never wrote in terms of anything except the greatest affection about the kind of intelligent, educated professional background from which he came." We later learned that Arthur Waugh, that kindly, unsophisticated, embarrassing old publisher, was bitterly upset by the way his son Evelyn came to look down on his parents.

Then, in 1980, Evelyn Waugh's *Letters* was published. This is a superb book, often wise and delightful as well as funny. Waugh was perhaps the last great English author who was a great letter writer. But then one notices the tone in which Waugh wrote to and about his family: the patronizing, bullying letters

to Laura, his sweet-natured but dowdy wife, and the endless litany of complaints about his children. Evelyn reported on "a day of supreme self-sacrifice," taking Bron out in London—St. Paul's Cathedral, lunch at a hotel, "vast quantities of toys" bought at Harrods, tea with a friend. When they went home, Bron told his grandmother it was "a bit dull." "So that is the last time for some years I inconvenience myself for my children," Evelyn told Laura. "You might rub that in to him." The poor child was five. It was at about this time that Evelyn told an American magazine with icy jocosity that he saw his children "once a day for ten, I hope, awe-inspiring minutes." Then when Bron was six, his father said with more chilling humor that he had behaved well at Christmas, "so I have sent him to a boarding school for a reward."

Even then, and even where Bron was concerned, the letters are redeemed by wit. Waugh told Nancy Mitford how the nine-year-old Bron had written from school that it was hard to be nice to one other boy: "He is most disagreeable. Very



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weak and all the boys & masters hate him." And so, said his father, "I have written a tremendous homily on the nature of the English gentleman who always protects the weaker & unpopular. Can't say I ever noticed it much myself." But still the wit is wintry.

In the letters written after Bron reached Downside, the Benedictine abbey where he went to school in his teens, tension begins to crackle off the page. At sixteen Bron asked whether he could leave. Surprisingly, Evelyn expressed sympathy with "your restlessness with school life." He wrote, "I felt as you do at your age, asked my father to remove me, was resentful at the time when he refused. Now I am grateful to him." He gave Bron good advice against messing up his life "because you lack the will-power and self-control to make a success of the next eighteen months" (not that willpower and self-control were Evelyn's strong points). And he wrote words that would make anyone smile who knew Bron later: "You have a sense of humour and a good gift of self expression. On the other hand you are singularly imprudent and you have a defective sense of honour. These bad qualities can lead to disaster."

There is much common sense in these letters: "Growing up is a disagreeable process for most men. You have to grow up somewhere. Downside seems to me the best place, but I am always open to other suggestions." There is some self-awareness: "In the hope of understanding you better I have been reading the diaries I kept at your age. I am appalled at what an odious prig I was." But love? Even the subscription to the letters has a mocking distance. Writing to Margaret, undisguisedly his favorite child, he signed, "All love Papa"; writing to Bron, he signed, "Your affec. papa E Waugh."

Welcoming Bron home "from the torrid & treacherous island of Cyprus" for what proved many months in the hospital, Evelyn wrote coolly, "I wish I could come and greet you but I have a long-standing and very tedious engagement," and "tedious" was always the operative word for Evelyn. In his 1966 article Bron

had claimed that Evelyn's last ten years "were probably the most mellow and tranquil of his life." This was more defiant denial—and quite impossible to sustain as the *Diaries*, the *Letters*, and the biographies appeared. All made it clear that Waugh was choleric and unstable for most of his life, and that the ten years before his death, at sixty-two, were a misery. His habitual boredom, acedia, and even torment were made much worse by a shocking physical deterioration, agonies with his teeth, and rage at the changes in the Catholic Church brought on by the Second Vatican Council. Nor was he much enlivened by his children as they grew up, and his references to Bron after his career as a writer had begun are sarcastic and unenthusiastic (his first novel "has had an undeserved but gratifying success").

Then, ten years ago, Bron published his autobiography, *Will This Do?*, and came clean. His father, although a source of wonderful humor and fantasy when he chose to be, had been a monster, not so much of cruelty and oppression as of rejection, withholding all signs of love. Whatever else he was, it was not "affec." It wasn't just that Evelyn found his children's company "irksome," and that he dispatched them wickedly young to what Bron called "pretty hellish" schools, where "we were miserable to be leaving the comforts of home and of our own company." Bron claimed sarcastically that "the most welcome aspect of him, as a parent, was his lack of interest in his children." But what sense of loss lay behind his irony?

When the autobiography was published, one story became famous, and was even rather unconvincingly dramatized on television. Returning from the army, Evelyn dined with his family, who had acquired some bananas, a desperately rare and sought-after delicacy in England at the time. Little Bron watched as his father took the boy's banana as well as his own and slowly ate it. At the launch party for *Will This Do?* Julian Barnes brought a banana and ceremoniously

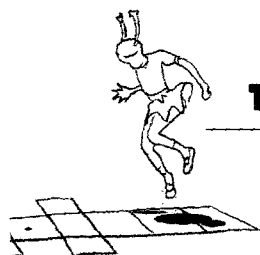
presented it to Bron. We all laughed. Later I wondered how funny it really was, and whether a banana was Bron's Rosebud, a symbol of his lost childhood.

Genius and sanctity do not thrive except from suffering, Evelyn Waugh once wrote. In a peculiar and minor mode, Bron was sometimes touched by genius, though he was not a saint. His verbal brutality, his hounding of his enemies, his love of practical jokes, all had a mildly psychopathic side, one more inheritance from his father. He conducted endless vendettas, whose origins are mostly too boring to explain. When he was engaged in a feud with Jeremy Thorpe, the sometime leader of the Liberal Party, who was acquitted on charges of conspiring to murder a troublesome former boyfriend, I said I could almost sympathize with Thorpe after he had been well-nigh persecuted by the boy. Bron replied, "Oh, but one spends one's life persecuting people."

Once rebuked by a friend for behavior awful in a self-proclaimed Christian, Evelyn Waugh had replied that he would be much worse if he weren't a Christian. Bron shrewdly said that this was untrue, and that without his obsessive religious faith, his father would have been less strictly charitable but a much nicer man to know. Undoubtedly a nicer man to know than his father, Bron gradually shed his Catholicism. In his autobiography he said that he had been able to stop going to church only when the Church had become unrecognizable as the one his father had joined, but this, too, was a trifle disingenuous. He simply had done what many intelligent, educated people of strong religious upbringing do, and quietly become an agnostic.

Then again, maybe there really was a connection between his loss of faith and his feelings toward his father. In his autobiography he owned up, and made clear, albeit in oblique language, the misery he had suffered as a boy from rejection by the father he idolized. Bron was himself—will you be surprised to learn?—a deeply affectionate father. He never sent his children away to school. ▀

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THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

Craftwork

Answers to this puzzle's clues are to be used as material for crafting a sort of work. The twelve entries with letters projecting out of the grid form the Frame; these are clued as a group, but in no special order. Bearing in mind some simple directions offered by the projecting letters should help solvers orient these entries, which do not intersect any of the shaded squares. Use the Frame as a guide for placing the Fill entries, which are also clued in random order. With all clue answers in place, only the centermost square will remain empty. Once the proper letter is added, your finished craftwork may be identified by reading the letters in the shaded squares column by column from left to right. If word-separating bars were shown, they would be seen to form a pattern that would be the same when rotated 180 degrees. Six answers are capitalized; Frame Clue f's answer is an alternate spelling.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 119.

FRAME

- One who crafts work, with direction (6)
- Odd places for surgeons' unverified reports (6)
- Taking care of inn's rug with alterations (7)
- Bats 1000 in Texas town (5)
- Bit of mold found in Russian bread and rolls (7)
- Warn Al about sea creature (6)
- Copper entering unit at the signal (2,3)
- I complain about one of the Judds (5)
- Zinc usually coats anvil (5)
- A flimsy paper under discussion (2,5)
- Set brew out for man of words (7)
- Claim bar order, taking stage (6)

FILL

- Rings inset with last of garnet floral pieces (6)
- One who refuses to acknowledge measure of a cloth's fineness (6)
- First person alien spaceship's leader encounters (5)
- Cartoonist put the finishing touches on splitting mountain (2,4)
- Bush's party spread earliest of reports (5)
- Worldly head of London spy group returned (4)
- Soaked coast penetrated by gale (8)
- Fur-clad swimmer is warmer, except for the face (5)
- Tripod I fixed with 100 of refractive lenses (8)
- Ignited around oxygen, street exploded (4,2)
- Bother with orange pasta sauce (5)
- Twisted Iron's film style (4)
- Holding horseshoe and cup, act confounded (6)
- Little bird with the French name (5)
- Feels sorry for accepting general's messy lodgings (8)
- Tumultuous noise after Thompson's introduction (4-2)
- Oddly neglected meteor site's unearthly (5)
- Cracks resistance in stalemates (5)
- Forward through time (4)
- Hard workers not starting for former football team (6)
- Like one opposite to North America? (5)
- Piece for a chorale or a small group about love (8)
- Irish area's sad result (6)
- Team stripped screws (4)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.



WORD COURT

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

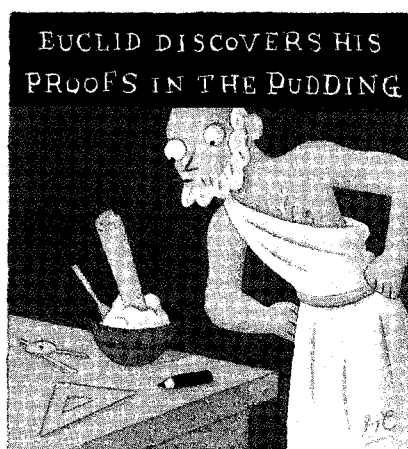
MARY C. WHITE, of Callicoon, New York, writes, "For the past few months I have heard on radio and TV and seen in print this oddity: *The proof is in the pudding*. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* recently quoted Sandra Thurman, who had been President Clinton's AIDS czar: "It's wonderful that they're going to keep the [White House AIDS] office open," she said. "But *the proof is in the pudding*." What do you suppose this means? Have the people who say it never heard or read *The proof of the pudding is in the eating*? Or does the newer phrase have some other meaning that I'm just too unhip to get? It's getting more prevalent and must be stopped before it's too late."

You're right about which expression is the original one; it comes from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Nonetheless, the shorter version is hardly brand-new: in online archives it is easily found in newspapers and magazines from some twenty years ago. Context usually makes clear that the shorter version is intended to mean what Cervantes's saying obviously does—fitting conceptually between, oh, say, "Seeing is believing" and Aesop's "Nature will out," a few thoughts down the way from "*Qué será será*." There's really only one reason, then, to object to the shorter version, although this reason is compelling: *The proof is in the pudding* doesn't make any sense.

CATHY O'DONNELL, of Bethesda, Maryland, writes, "My question concerns the proper way to address two people with the same last name living at the same address. I work for a nonprofit organization, and we receive donations from people who send in a check with two names or simply put their first names on a form—for example, *Jane and John Doe*. In our thank-you letter to them is it proper to say 'Dear Mr. and Ms. Doe' or should it be 'Dear Ms. Doe and Mr.

Doe'? We don't like to assume they are husband and wife; hence we do not use *Mrs.* unless they fill out the form specifically stating *Mrs.* Also, which would be proper for the address: *Jane and John Doe* or *Ms. Jane and Mr. John Doe*?"

Even in these quick-to-take-offense days, I can't imagine why two people who have a joint checking account and the same last name would be annoyed at you for supposing that they *share* their name. People who are prickly about how they are referred to tend to make that clear in advance. A woman might sign



her letter *Jane Doe* (*Mrs. John Doe*), for instance—and it is considerate to pick up on hints like this. Absent any such hint, *Mr. and Ms. Doe* will be fine in the salutation, and *John and Jane Doe* will be fine in the address. It's traditional to put the man's courtesy title first, but you may well prefer to follow whatever order specific donors use.

JEFFREY H. TIGAY, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, writes, "One bit of linguistic ignorance that cries for attention is the use of *may* when *might* is meant. I once heard a TV anchorman say that 'one bullet aimed at Hitler *may* have saved millions of lives.' 'May have'? As if there's still a chance that those millions of people survived Hitler? And my local

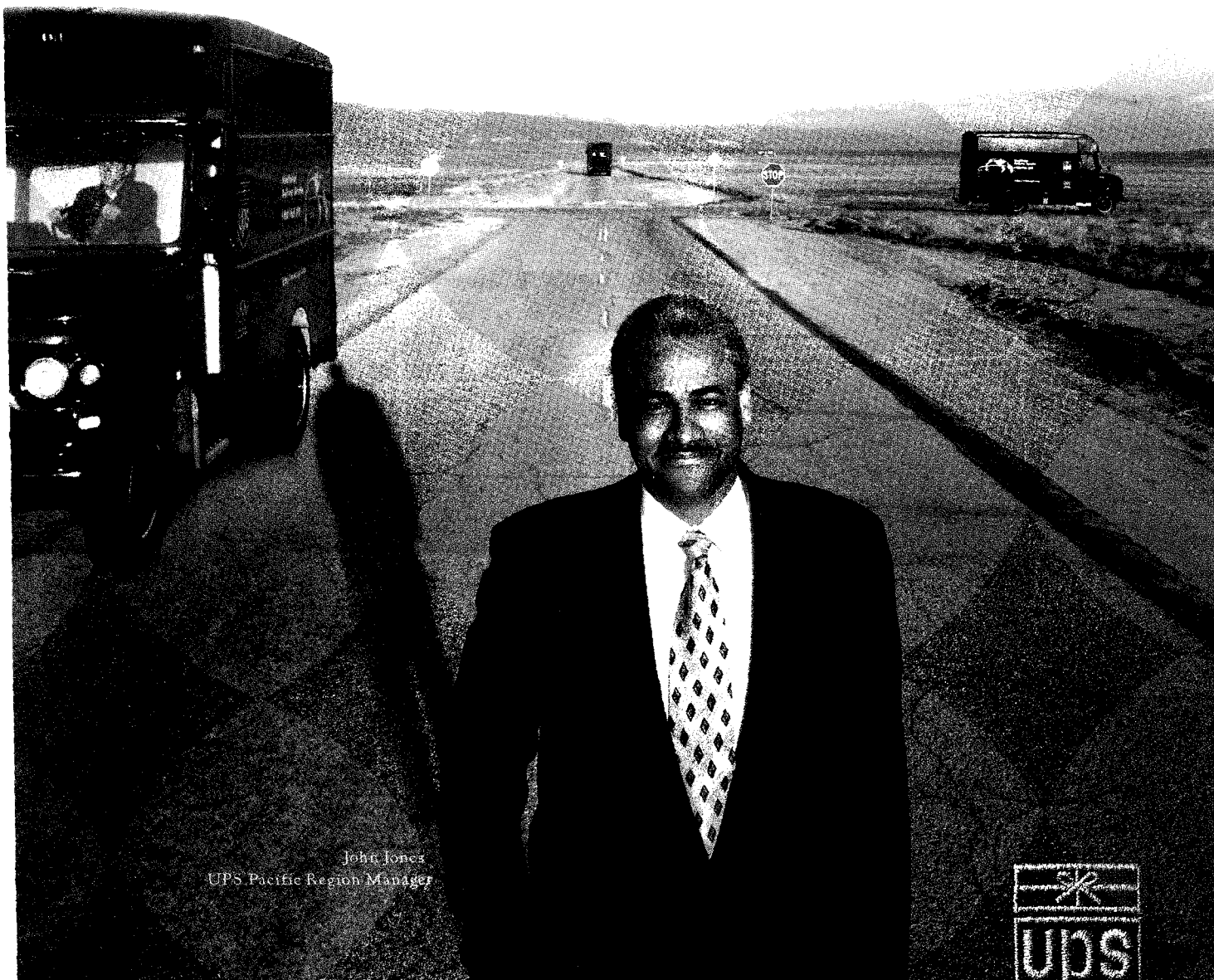
newspaper once reported that an unfortunate judge who was killed when a block of cement fell on him *may* still be alive had he not walked where he did at the wrong moment. When I read that, I felt like alerting his family so that they could have his body exhumed and examined."

As a verb, *might* is really just the past tense of *may*. But the issue here is not that Hitler and your unlucky judge both belong to the ages: note that the wording of "Hitler *may* have been the most heinous tyrant in history" is perfectly correct. A past-tense verb like *might*, besides talking about what has already happened, can be used to talk about things—past, present, or future—that are wholly hypothetical and counterfactual. The past tense, that is, can express the subjunctive mood. For instance, "if wishes *were* horses" isn't about past wishes but is about wishes that are not and never will be horses.

Might has long been used in ways that would be hard to predict from reading about the subjunctive in style guides and basic grammar books. Consider "I *might* start volunteering at the homeless shelter" and "*Might* I be of service?" In these sentences, which nearly everyone would consider correct, *might* simply expresses a bit more uncertainty or deference than *may* would. So some boundaries between *might* and *may* are blurred. Yet there remains a difference—as you know. *Might* is the only proper choice when talking about hypothetical things that did not happen—as in both your examples—or possibilities in the present or future that cannot happen: "If wishes were horses, beggars *might* ride."

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to MsGrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.

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